



BREAKING THE CYCLE: THE FIFTH PROGRESS REPORT

Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy
2013 Annual Report

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MINISTER'S MESSAGE



The Honourable Teresa Piruzza
Minister of Children and Youth Services

The Poverty Reduction Strategy continues to be part of our government's plan to invest in people, build modern infrastructure and support a dynamic and innovative business climate, which is helping to build a successful, vital province where everyone has the opportunity to connect, contribute and achieve their goals.

When *Breaking the Cycle: Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy* was launched in 2008, it signalled a bold, new vision for a fairer society in Ontario. The strategy recognized that we all need to work together – community partners and all levels of government – to break down barriers, provide opportunities and create more prosperity for all. Poverty is a complex issue that requires a variety of approaches to overcome many different obstacles.

As Minister of Children and Youth Services and Minister Responsible for Women's Issues, I am proud of Ontario's efforts to reduce poverty over the past five years. I am pleased to provide the 2013 Annual Report on the progress of our first Poverty Reduction Strategy, including an assessment of the last five years.

Our government has remained steadfast in our commitment to alleviate poverty. This report demonstrates that the initiatives and strategic investments have helped low-income Ontarians and reduced child poverty in the province by lifting more than 47,000 children and their families out of poverty between 2008 and 2011. In 2011 alone, the strategy prevented an additional 61,000 children from living in poverty. Through increases to the Ontario Child Benefit, social assistance and minimum wage, families now have more income to meet their basic needs.

Our first strategy focused on providing young people with the supports and opportunities they need to develop into healthy, productive adults. We made significant progress through strategic initiatives that support healthy growth and development, as well as school success. This included a focus on early literacy and numeracy, full-day kindergarten, student nutrition, dental care, quality child care, after school programs, and youth employment and training opportunities.

This report includes an assessment of the key commitments made under our first strategy. For example, full-day kindergarten – a key commitment – is on track to be fully implemented across the province.

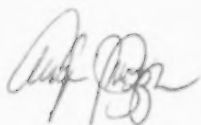
As we continue to develop our new strategy for the next five years, it is with the belief that all of our partners – including other levels of government, community agencies, businesses, young people, families and those who have lived in poverty – have important roles to play. So many Ontarians, in communities across the province, were instrumental in the creation of our first strategy, and are a source of great inspiration and ideas for our next strategy.

I am pleased that Premier Wynne has created a permanent Cabinet Committee on Poverty Reduction and Social Inclusion to take a cross-government approach to developing our second strategy. As co-chair with Ted McMeekin, Minister of Community and Social Services, I am determined to build on the success of our first strategy in order to break the cycle of poverty and create opportunities for all Ontarians.

I want to thank the thousands of individuals and organizations who participated in productive discussions on poverty in communities across Ontario this past summer and fall. Thank you for your passion, your insights and your suggestions.

The Poverty Reduction Strategy continues to be part of our government's plan to invest in people, build modern infrastructure and support a dynamic and innovative business climate, which is helping to build a successful, vital province where everyone has the opportunity to connect, contribute and achieve their goals.

By working together we will build on the success of our first strategy and continue to break the cycle of poverty.



The Honourable Teresa Pinizza
Minister of Children and Youth Services

INTRODUCTION

Ontario's First Poverty Reduction Strategy

Poverty Reduction Strategy Milestones

2008

- Public consultations are held.
- Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy is launched.

2009

- A Results Table is established to guide and monitor implementation of the strategy.
- The historic *Poverty Reduction Act, 2009* is passed.
- The Ontario Child Benefit phase-in schedule is accelerated by two years – maximum annual payments are increased to \$1,100 annually per child under 18.

2010

- Minimum wage is increased to \$10.25.
- Full-day kindergarten is rolled out in nearly 600 schools across the province for approximately 35,000 students.
- The Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy is released.

Ontario's first Poverty Reduction Strategy, *Breaking the Cycle*, was transformational in nature. It set out a bold vision to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty by focusing on children and their families.

Launched in late 2008, the strategy increased supports and invested in protecting the most vulnerable children and families in Ontario, which helped shelter them from the economic impact of the recession and provided financial stability when low-income families needed it most.

Our government invested substantially in building a better and more prosperous future for children and their families. We created a strong foundation to help lift children and low-income families out of poverty by providing them with the tools to reach their full potential.

Poverty increases costs to our health care, justice, and social assistance systems. By addressing the root causes of poverty, we are developing a healthy, educated, and employable workforce that is critical to the economic and future success of our province.

Breaking the Cycle of Poverty

From the outset, the strategy focused on breaking the cycle of poverty by targeting its root causes. Improving the lives of children in low-income families was at the heart of Ontario's first Poverty Reduction Strategy.

Our government was determined to look beyond "Band-Aid" solutions towards more integrated programs and initiatives that collectively would break the cycle of poverty in the short term and increase opportunities in the long term. The data for all five years of Ontario's first Poverty Reduction Strategy will not be available until 2015. However, we know that through the collective impact of a range of initiatives, 47,000 children were lifted out of poverty between 2008 and 2011.

We are proud of this accomplishment. During the previous two recessions in the early 1980s and 1990s, child poverty rates increased. During the last recession, through increases in key supports such as

the **Ontario Child Benefit**, **social assistance** and the **minimum wage**, families had more income to meet their basic needs. As a result, the actual child poverty rate decreased in Ontario from 15.2 per cent in 2008 to 13.6 per cent in 2011. Without our strategy, an estimated 61,000 children would have been in poverty in 2011.

Our government has also made progress on our other measures of poverty. Each of our indicators shows an improvement since the launch of the strategy in 2008. See page 58 for more information.

Poverty Reduction Strategy Milestones

2011

- ♦ Full-day kindergarten expands to nearly 800 schools and approximately 50,000 students.
- ♦ Ontario's Comprehensive Mental Health and Addictions Strategy is launched.
- ♦ The Social Assistance Review begins.
- ♦ An agreement is reached between the provincial and federal governments providing combined funding of \$481 million under the Investment in Affordable Housing for Ontario program.

2012

- ♦ Investments in child care increase to more than \$1 billion annually.
- ♦ Full-day kindergarten expands to 1,700 schools and about 122,000 students.
- ♦ The Youth Action Plan is released and makes new investments in 20 initiatives that provide youth at risk with access to additional experiences to improve their lives.
- ♦ A 30% Off Ontario Tuition Grant is introduced to help students from low- to middle-income families gain access to postsecondary education.
- ♦ The final report of the Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario is released.

At the outset, we knew that achieving our ambitious "25-in-5" (25 per cent child poverty reduction in five years) target would be difficult. We knew it would require sustained economic growth and additional federal investments, neither of which came to pass. We have consistently called on the federal government to be engaged partners in our efforts to reduce poverty in Ontario. Creating opportunities for people in poverty requires "all hands on deck." Additional federal investments would have brought us closer to achieving our target and would have further improved outcomes for Ontarians living in poverty.

Setting this goal raised the bar and pushed our government to make inroads on many fronts in our long-term commitment to break the cycle of poverty. As a result, we have established a solid foundation on which to build a new Poverty Reduction Strategy and create a fair society where everyone has the chance to succeed. Our comprehensive strategy focused on providing much-needed supports right from the beginning.

Early Intervention

Through early interventions, our government targeted the challenges faced by children born into and growing up in poverty. Extensive investments in the strategy focused on supporting the early years, including:

- ♦ Almost \$1 billion annually in the **Ontario Child Benefit** to help about 530,000 families provide everyday necessities to over one million children;
- ♦ More than \$1 billion annually to support modernizing **child care** and allow families greater access to the labour force;
- ♦ In addition to funding received through the Grants for Student Needs in 2013-14, the ministry will provide about \$963 million in funding to school boards to support Year Four of **Full-day kindergarten** to help close the learning gaps for children from low-income families and support their future success; and
- ♦ To date, over \$1.45 billion in capital funding to support the implementation of **Full-day kindergarten**.

Our government also invested in programs like **Children In Need Of Treatment** and **Healthy Smiles Ontario**, which provide free dental services for children from low-income backgrounds to improve their health and overall wellbeing.

Poverty Reduction Strategy Milestones

2013

- A Minimum Wage Advisory Panel is established to inform future adjustments to the minimum wage.
- The Ontario Child Benefit increases to \$1,210 annually per child under 18.
- Full-day kindergarten expands to about 2,600 schools and almost 184,000 students.
- The 100% Tuition Aid for Youth Leaving Care program is available to current and former Crown wards and/or youth leaving care – the program covers 100 per cent of a student's tuition fees to a maximum of \$6,000 per year for up to four years.
- The Student Nutrition Program is expanded to create an additional 200 programs over two years, serving about 33,000 more children and youth.
- Ontario is helping young people across the province by creating 30,000 job opportunities through the new Youth Jobs Strategy.
- Public consultations are held for the new Poverty Reduction Strategy.

Supporting Ontario's Children to Young Adulthood

We invested in the future potential of Ontario's children. Our government introduced initiatives and programs to support them to succeed through to young adulthood. We expanded nutrition programs across the province to ensure that children would not be too hungry to learn. Through Ontario's **Student Nutrition Program** in the 2012-13 school year, over 695,000 school-aged children and youth were served by more than 4,200 breakfast, lunch and snack programs.

Our government also invested in the **After School Program** to provide school-aged children and youth with free, safe, and healthy activities between the hours of 3 p.m. and 6 p.m. Having access to high-quality, supervised activities increases opportunities for active, healthy living and helps children and youth avoid high-risk behaviours.

Education is the key to future employment. Our government made key investments in initiatives to support children in high-needs neighbourhoods to stay in school and to continue their education in college or university or by learning a trade. Through initiatives like **Pathways to Education**, we have helped more students in Ontario graduate from high school and seek postsecondary education, many of whom were the first in their families to do so. The dropout rate for participating youth in the Regent Park program has declined by 75 per cent.

We supported programs that targeted children and youth with unique needs, such as Crown wards. Through our **Crown Ward Success Strategy**, we have helped youth in care and former youth in care complete high school, move on to postsecondary education, and find gainful employment. The **100% Tuition Aid for Youth Leaving Care** program is for current and former Crown wards and/or youth leaving care. The program will cover 100 per cent of a student's tuition fees to a maximum of \$6,000 per year, and is available for up to four years of postsecondary study.

Our government also made significant investments in the **Ontario Student Assistance Program**, including the introduction of the new **30% Off Ontario Tuition Grant**, which increases the opportunity for students to access postsecondary education by making it more affordable.



Engaging Youth

We launched Ontario's **Youth Action Plan** in 2012 to support youth from underserved and disadvantaged communities and provide them with greater opportunities to reach their full potential. The plan included a range of short- and long-term interventions, such as the creation of the annual \$5 million **Youth Opportunities Fund** to support local community initiatives in high-needs neighbourhoods.

Building on the Youth Action Plan, we released **Stepping Up: A Strategic Framework to Help Ontario's Youth Succeed** in 2013. Stepping Up is a framework to guide government's decision-making, and a resource for those who want to align their work with youth toward common, evidence-based outcomes. We will report annually on the outcomes and indicators that form Stepping Up's Profile of Youth Wellbeing, and use the findings to inform our priorities for youth. Stepping Up identifies a number of cross-cutting actions that will guide our ongoing work, such as **Local Youth Action Collaboratives**, a **Youth Research and Evaluation Hub** program, and the **Premier's Council on Youth Opportunities**.

Employment and Housing Supports

Our government invested in a wide range of employment supports to assist those who are unemployed or seeking to improve their skills to gain better job opportunities. This included investing over \$314.5 million in 2013-14 in **Employment Ontario's Employment Service**, which provided help to more than 600,000 people to improve their skills and find employment. We have supported initiatives that have helped laid-off workers re-enter the workforce; foreign-trained newcomers gain a foothold in their adopted homeland; and women at risk of domestic violence gain independence by acquiring marketable job skills.

We have also overseen the largest affordable housing investment in Ontario's history by committing nearly \$3 billion since 2003 to create and repair affordable housing, provide rent supplements and housing allowances, and support many other related initiatives.

Safety Net

Our government has taken steps to strengthen the social safety net for Ontarians most in need. We have increased social assistance rates by 16 to 18.7 per cent for singles, families and individuals with disabilities. We also established the **Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario**, which conducted the first comprehensive review of social assistance in the province in over two decades. The Commission's advice helped us start our reform plan this year with a focus on improving incomes, promoting better employment outcomes, and increasing fairness.

We continued to invest in social assistance even while tackling the deficit, to secure the future of the province's social programs on which so many low-income Ontarians depend. This year, we announced investments of more than \$400 million over three years. We improved the rates again, with priority given to those in deepest need. We are also allowing clients to earn up to \$200 a month without affecting their assistance. This can help them gain a foothold in the workforce and



move towards greater independence. And we increased the amount of assets people can retain when they need to turn to Ontario Works so they don't have to give everything up to get help.

We have acknowledged the need for careful and measured action to reform this system over time. Our government is continuing to work with our partners, clients and others to map out a plan for change as we move forward.

Starting in 2004, our government has implemented seven successive increases to minimum wage – from \$6.85 to \$10.25. As a sign of our ongoing commitment to protecting low-wage workers, we recently established an **Advisory Panel on Minimum Wage** to inform future adjustments to minimum wage.

Our government has also reduced the economic burden on low-income Ontarians by introducing tax reduction measures under **Ontario's Tax Plan for Jobs and Growth**. These changes are estimated to deliver \$2.5 billion of additional relief in 2013-14, primarily to low- to moderate-income people. The government also introduced the **Ontario Senior Homeowners' Property Tax Grant** that provides up to \$500 a year to low- to moderate-income senior homeowners to help them pay their property taxes. The 2013 grant is estimated to provide \$210 million to low- to moderate-income senior homeowners.

Strengthening Communities

To find lasting solutions to the multitude of issues related to poverty, our government partnered with several social services organizations to build stronger communities and help lift Ontarians out of poverty. The **Partnership Project** was launched in 2010 to strengthen the province's not-for-profit sector, which plays an important role in serving the needs of low-income Ontarians and helping to alleviate poverty. The project is streamlining and modernizing our relationship with the not-for-profit sector to help organizations better leverage the work they do in communities across the province.

The Fifth Progress Report

The roots of poverty are deep and complex. Overcoming them requires an ongoing long-term commitment and the collaboration of all levels of government, as well as the private and non-profit sectors, and communities as a whole. We must all work together to alleviate poverty. It robs our society of untold potential.

We are proud of what we have achieved over the past five years through the first Poverty Reduction Strategy. We remain committed to creating future opportunities that will nurture a fair society and provide all Ontarians with the tools to reach their full potential.

This Progress Report outlines the important investments we have made to this point to help raise Ontarians out of poverty.



Measuring Our Progress



The government made a commitment to report and track the progress and impact of the Poverty Reduction Strategy. To help us do so, we developed a set of indicators, which collectively paint a complete picture of the strategy's impact over time. The indicators look at poverty from a variety of dimensions, such as income levels, education, health, housing and standard of living.

Indicators of Opportunity

The eight indicators are:

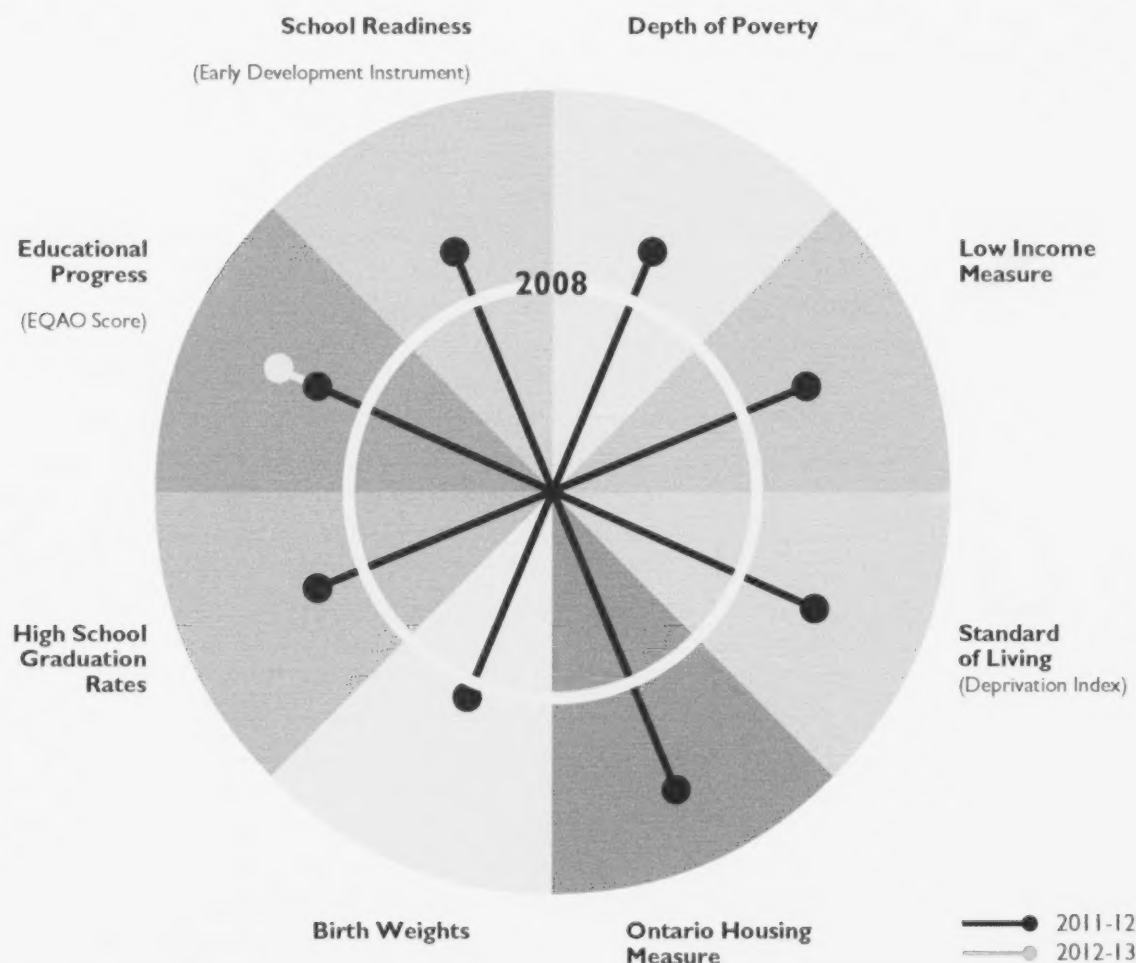
1. School Readiness
2. High School Graduation Rates
3. Educational Progress
4. Birth Weights
5. Low Income Measure
6. Depth of Poverty
7. Standard of Living
8. Ontario Housing Measure

For more information on the Indicators, please see page 58.

The Child and Youth Opportunity Wheel is a visual way to look at improvements in each of the eight indicators of opportunity over time. The inside circle represents the starting point in 2008. The spokes going out from the centre measure progress. The further the spoke is from the inner circle, the greater the improvement.

We have made gains in all the key indicators.

The Child and Youth Opportunity Wheel



Breaking the Cycle: Ontario's Poverty Strategy			Launch of PRS†	Year One	Year Two	Year Three	Year Four	OVERALL TREND
Indicator	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	Progress
Birth Weights*		80.0%			80.7%			Progress
School Readiness* (Early Development Instrument)		71.5%			72.4%			Progress
Educational Progress** (Combined Grade 3 and Grade 6)			67.0%	68.0%	69.0%	70.0%	71.0%	Progress
High School Graduation Rates			79.0%	81.0%	82.0%	83.0%		Progress
Low Income Measure			15.2%	14.6%	13.8%	13.6%		Progress
Depth of Poverty			8.5%	7.3%	7.1%	7.7%		Progress
Standard of Living*** (Deprivation Index)			12.5%	9.1%	10.5%	10.1%		Progress
Ontario Housing Measure			5.4%	5.0%	4.2%	5.1%		Progress

Notes: *Reported on a three-year cycle. **Educational Progress (EQAO) scores for 2011-12 were released in Summer 2012. Other 2011-12 data will be available in 2013. ***The release of the 2011 Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics (released in June 2013) included a historical revision to the 2009 and 2010 deprivation data. The data for this indicator cannot be compared with previous reports for this reason. †PRS = Poverty Reduction Strategy.

PROGRESS: BUILDING ON THE FOUNDATION

Stronger, Healthier Kids and Families

Giving Kids the Best Possible Start in Life

Every child deserves the chance to reach their full potential. *Breaking the Cycle* focused on providing supports early in children's lives to give them opportunities to grow into independent and strong, contributing members of their communities.

An integrated system of services for children and families helped to alleviate the impact of poverty. A range of programs and initiatives were targeted at giving children the very best start in life and supporting them through their early school years. It has been shown that a good start offers the best chance for a successful future.

Why It Matters

The Ontario Child Benefit has removed a significant barrier to employment: more parents can move from social assistance into the workforce without losing their children's benefits.

Did You Know?

Families who have filed their previous year's income tax return and have registered their children for the Canada Child Tax Benefit are automatically assessed for Ontario Child Benefit eligibility by the Canada Revenue Agency. There is no separate application for the Ontario Child Benefit.

Ontario Child Benefit

The Ontario Child Benefit is a cornerstone initiative of our government's first Poverty Reduction Strategy. It provides a simple, income-tested financial benefit to low- and moderate-income families with children under the age of 18. By providing benefits outside of the social assistance system, the Ontario Child Benefit supports parents to make the transition from social assistance to the workforce. Overall, the monthly benefit has helped to strengthen the province's social safety net for low- to moderate-income families in Ontario.

What We Have Invested

Our government accelerated the implementation of the Ontario Child Benefit by two years in July 2009, providing up to \$1,100 annually per child in that year.

As of July 2013, eligible families receive up to a maximum of \$1,210 per child per year – an increase of \$110 per year from 2012-13. An additional increase will take effect in July 2014, raising the Ontario Child Benefit by another \$100 per year to \$1,310 per child per year.

Once fully implemented in July 2014, this represents a 118 per cent increase in the Ontario Child Benefit compared to 2008.

What We Have Achieved

The Ontario Child Benefit will help support more than one million children in about 530,000 families in the province in 2013-14. Increases taking effect this year and next will extend benefits to an additional 90,000 children in 46,000 families. Under this initiative, families have seen their benefits steadily increase and new families have become eligible.

Next Steps

Our government is committed to its ongoing investment in the Ontario Child Benefit. The Ontario Child Benefit will continue to be a cornerstone initiative in the fight against child poverty.



Best Start Child and Family Centres

Our government released the Ontario Early Years Policy Framework that sets out a vision, guiding principles and strategic direction for early years programs and services for children up to age six and their families. The framework creates an effective approach to implementing Best Start Child and Family Centres by September 2014, and better integrating existing family support programs.

These improvements will provide better access to high-quality early years programs.

What We Have Invested

Our government invests approximately \$99 million annually for family support programs, including Parenting and Family Literacy Centres. This funding will be targeted to create an effective approach to implementing Best Start Child and Family Centres.

What We Have Achieved

The Community Action Research Project has enabled communities to find creative approaches to integrating child and family services at a local level.

Next Steps

We will provide families and caregivers with universally accessible early years programs, services and resources in easily accessible locations. The network of early years services will be supported by an easy-to-use provincial website. We are committed to ensuring that information and referrals to help families access screening, assessment, and other specialized services as needed, are readily accessible.

Collaboration across government and community organizations will establish a core set of expectations for providing high-quality early years programs, increasing access to services, and responding to the unique needs of diverse communities, including newcomers, francophones, First Nations and Métis peoples.

The Ministry of Children and Youth Services and the Ministry of Education are working closely with community project teams to develop and test strategies and approaches for integrated services and the development of Best Start Child and Family Centres.

Why It Matters

A more integrated, seamless early years approach improves the quality of services delivered to young children and their families. Providing children with the best early years programs gives children living in poverty a better chance of reaching their full potential.

Did You Know?

Many parents and caregivers find it difficult to navigate the current set of programs and services for young children. They will benefit from a streamlined and accessible range of services offered under one roof close to where they live.

Poverty Reduction Strategy in Action

The City of London, Ontario has taken significant steps toward an integrated child and family services system and the development of “hubs” that provide clear access points to services for local children and families. The municipality has led a community development and engagement process that helped set an overall goal for neighbourhood-based family centres in London. The community decided to establish centres in low-income neighbourhoods first, so that these families would have access to the services they need most.

Source: Ministry of Children and Youth Services



Child Care

High-quality, affordable child care is critically important to the wellbeing of low-income families. Being confident that their children are being cared for in a safe and enriching environment allows parents to effectively participate in the workforce. The ability of low-income parents to seek financial independence is often tied to the availability of reliable child care. Our government is committed to funding, licensing and developing child care policies that strengthen the accessibility and availability of child care for those families most in need.

In April 2010, our government announced the transfer of responsibility for child care from the Ministry of Children and Youth Services to the Ministry of Education in order to create an integrated system and support transitions for children and families. It is essential to align the education and child care sectors to build a high-quality, accessible and coordinated early learning and child care system in Ontario.

What We Have Invested

Since 2003-04, the Ontario government has increased funding for child care by 90 per cent – to more than \$1 billion. This includes the following:

- Funding to support the child care sector as full-day kindergarten was implemented;
- Extending and enhancing funding to modernize child care, bringing the total new investment since 2012 to \$346 million over four years; and,
- Providing \$113 million, over three years, to school boards to support retrofits and renovations of school-based child care spaces that can be repurposed to serve younger children.

What We Have Achieved

Through our investments, the parents/caregivers of nearly 43,000 more children are receiving child care fee subsidies every year. We have also expanded full fee subsidy eligibility to families earning under \$20,000. This helps ensure low-income working parents can continue to have access to affordable, high-quality child care and play an active role in the labour force. We have also created more than 22,000 new licensed not-for-profit child care spaces. More than half of the new spaces are in schools. Many received capital funds to retrofit or create purpose-built space.

Next Steps

We are committed to continuing our investment in the child care sector to build a strong foundation for the early years. Our government is taking further steps to realize its vision of a more seamless and integrated system.

Modernizing child care will help:

- Maintain stable child care fees for parents;
- Reduce child care centre closures, so that parents have child care they can count on;
- Increase quality and accountability; and,
- Increase convenience and support seamless transition by focusing on retrofits to school-based child care.

We are committed to maintaining and enhancing services because we know how important child care and early learning are for children and families. Our government recognizes that continued investment will build a strong foundation for the early years, which is a powerful key to Ontario's social and economic future.

Why It Matters

Investing in child care helps to support low-income families to gain self-sufficiency and build a stronger future for themselves and their children.

Did You Know?

In December 2012, the Ministry of Education released a new child care funding formula. The new funding formula is a more transparent, evidence based, and equitable approach to allocating provincial funds to target areas where there is demographic growth.



Full-Day Kindergarten

The roll out of full-day kindergarten for four- and five-year-olds in Ontario began in September 2010. One of the initial goals was to locate a portion of full-day kindergarten spaces in low-income neighbourhoods. Full-day kindergarten is aimed at enhancing the learning of four- and five-year-olds to improve their reading, writing, and math skills. This provides a smoother transition to Grade 1 and helps increase their future success in school.

Schools with full-day kindergarten programs are required to offer before and after school programs, if there is sufficient demand, to meet the child care needs of working families.

What We Have Invested

In addition to funding Grants for Student Needs in 2013-14, the ministry will provide about \$963 million in funding to school boards to support Year Four of full-day kindergarten.

To date, the government has allocated just over \$1.45 billion in capital funding to support the implementation of full-day kindergarten across Ontario.

What We Have Achieved

In Year One, full-day kindergarten was implemented in approximately 600 schools for 35,000 children. Full-day kindergarten is currently in its fourth year of implementation. When fully implemented, 265,000 of Ontario's four- and five-year-olds at approximately 3,600 schools will benefit from the program.

In 2012-13, about 62 per cent of schools with full-day kindergarten (1,055 schools) offered before and after school programs, up from 52 per cent in 2011-12.

Next Steps

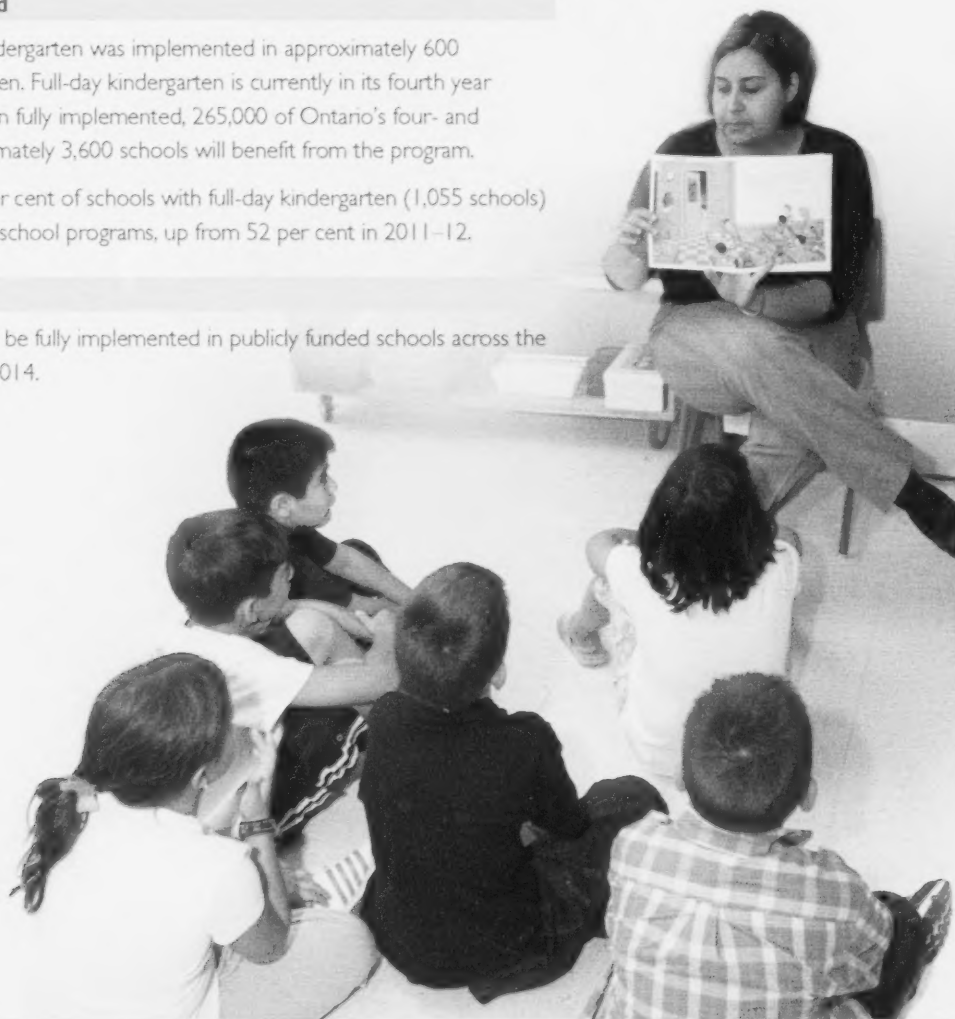
Full-day kindergarten will be fully implemented in publicly funded schools across the province in September 2014.

Why It Matters

Full-day kindergarten helps to close learning gaps for children from low-income families. It helps to ensure early learning success for all children, which contributes to future academic success.

Did You Know?

With the introduction of full-day kindergarten, parents are saving up to \$6,500 a year per child on child care and have more employment opportunities.



Parenting and Family Literacy Centres

Parenting and Family Literacy Centres are school-based programs where parents/caregivers and children up to six years of age participate together in a range of play-based learning activities. The goal is to help young children acquire early literacy and numeracy skills. The programs are located in high-needs communities, staffed by trained early childhood educators, and run during the school day for 20 hours per week. Parenting and Family Literacy Centres also offer parenting information that helps to build parents' confidence and competence. The centres provide support to parents of children with special needs and connect families with appropriate community resources for special needs, health, and other related services.

What We Have Invested

We are investing \$11.7 million in 2013-14 in Parenting and Family Literacy Centres to support children's early learning and development and to lay the foundation for their successful transition to school.

What We Have Achieved

There are currently 172 Parenting and Family Literacy Centres across Ontario – this includes 17 new centres added during the 2012-13 school year.

Next Steps

Parenting and Family Literacy Centres will be part of an integrated system of family supports as Best Start Child and Family Centres are implemented.

Why It Matters

Parenting and Family Literacy Centres help children build essential literacy, numeracy, language, and social skills. There is increasing evidence that experience-based brain development in the early years of life set neurological and biological pathways that positively affect lifelong health, learning, and behaviour.

Did You Know?

A 2009 research study by the Toronto District School Board showed the measurable difference Parenting and Family Literacy Centres can make for children in high-risk neighbourhoods. Children who attended Parenting and Family Literacy Centres scored better in five developmental areas, including language and cognitive development, than their school peers of similar socioeconomic backgrounds who had not attended the programs. The study provided compelling evidence that children who attend the Centres exhibit increased in school engagement and better academic performance. They also have more positive school experiences over the longer term.

Poverty Reduction Strategy in Action

Voices of Parenting and Family Literacy Centres participants

"I love this place. No matter who you are or where you come from, you fit in. That's what is so great – I can talk to anybody and learn from other parents. It doesn't matter what country you are from, what clothes you wear or what language you speak."

"It has made a difference because, having no family in the area, I felt pretty isolated. Now I feel empowered and engaged."

"I tell other families to visit the Parenting and Family Literacy Centre, regardless of how old their children are. I have some friends with babies and I encourage them to attend. I tell them, 'you'd be amazed at what young children know and can do.' We often underestimate what children can do when they're little and what we think they know and don't know."

"The centre has helped prepare my daughter for school by teaching her how to deal with other children – how to work together with others, how to express herself when she's upset with a friend, how to play and share and take turns."

Source: Ministry of Education

Student Nutrition Program

Ontario's Student Nutrition Program helps community organizations provide nutritious meals and snacks to children and youth in elementary schools, secondary schools, and community locations across the province. Where it is offered, the program is universal so that all children and youth, including those who may be experiencing food insecurity at home, have access to nutritious meals to support their learning and success in school.

What We Have Invested

Our government's investment in the Student Nutrition Program has increased within the last five years. In 2008, a \$9.4 million investment was announced as part of the Poverty Reduction Strategy. In October 2013, in response to the Healthy Kids Panel, we increased our investment in the program by \$3 million, bringing our total annual investment to \$20.9 million – compared to \$8.5 million in 2007-08.

What We Have Achieved

In the 2012-13 school year, over 695,000 school-aged children and youth were served by more than 4,200 breakfast, lunch and snack programs.

Next Steps

The latest expansion of the Student Nutrition Program will create an additional 200 programs over two years, serving about 33,000 more children and youth. The expansion supports communities with higher needs and some First Nations communities to set up new breakfast or morning meal programs in schools. Implementation will begin in late 2013. Programs in some First Nations communities will be implemented in 2014-15.

Poverty Reduction Strategy in Action

Helping students learn, one healthy meal at a time

Students at Church Street Public School in downtown Toronto are getting a nutritious start to the day, thanks to Ontario's Student Nutrition Program. "The snack program is ensuring our students receive healthy foods so they can focus in the classroom and ultimately learn better," says Principal Nora Spence. "It's making a positive difference."

Church Street Public School is one of several schools in Toronto helping over 137,500 students get the most from their day through the program. The school relies on the generous support of volunteers and the local Loblaws store to provide fruits and vegetables and other healthy food to students in the morning.

Source: Ministry of Children and Youth Services

Why It Matters

Eating a healthy breakfast is critical for children and youth. Nourishment, particularly in the morning, enhances cognitive ability and concentration, which has a positive impact on behaviour and learning.

Did You Know?

One school breakfast study found that children who participated in the program had fewer psychosocial problems, including depression, anxiety, and hyperactivity.

Source: Nourishing Young Minds, June 2012 – Toronto Public Health

After School Program

Ontario's After School Program provides funding to recreation organizations to help children and youth in priority neighborhoods get active, develop healthy eating habits, gain confidence and improve academic achievement. It also helps reduce childhood obesity and youth violence.

What We Have Invested

From September 2013 to July 2014, our government will invest \$13 million in the After School Program.

What We Have Achieved

In the 2013-14 program year, Ontario's After School Program funding will help 134 service providers to deliver programs at 436 sites across the province. These programs will give about 20,650 children and youth the opportunity to get active, develop healthy eating habits, gain confidence and do better in school.

Next Steps

Ontario's After School Program will continue to provide supports to children and youth in priority neighbourhoods in 2014-15 and 2015-16 through 134 service providers.

Why It Matters

Ontario's After School Program provides a safe environment for children and youth to concentrate on their academics, be physically active and eat healthy. The program promotes lifelong health and wellness lessons in the after school hours when some youth have no other supervised, safe environment to go to.

Did You Know?

Children and youth in the After School Program are provided a healthy snack and participate in at least 162 minutes of physical activity per week as part of the program.



Increasing Access to Health Services

Poverty can rob children and families of their health throughout their lives. Providing access to needed health services that families might not otherwise be able to afford is an important step in removing barriers.

Breaking the cycle of poverty requires providing children with services that support their future health and wellbeing. Not being able to properly see a blackboard because of undetected vision problems or not being able to concentrate due to tooth pain are challenges that children from low-income families often face. The Poverty Reduction Strategy is committed to improving the health status of children by providing those in need with greater access to services.

Poverty Reduction Strategy in Action

"My two children were seen at their day care by a dental hygienist from Ottawa Public Health, who advised me about their dental problems.

"I was not able to take my children to a dentist because I could not afford it. The hygienist told me about the new Healthy Smiles Ontario dental program and helped me to enrol my children. She also was able to link me to a dentist for treatment.

"My seven-year-old daughter had one extraction and four dental sealants. My five-year-old son was referred to the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario where he had nine teeth fixed under general anesthesia. My children no longer have dental pain. They recently had checkups and the dentist said they are in great shape. The Healthy Smiles program helped me when I needed it, and as a parent I am very thankful for these services."

Source: Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care

Children In Need Of Treatment/Healthy Smiles Ontario

When *Breaking the Cycle* was announced in 2008, dental care was identified as a key priority. Our government committed to providing access to dental services for low-income families by expanding the eligibility criteria of the Children In Need Of Treatment program, and launching the Healthy Smiles Ontario program in October 2010.

The Children In Need Of Treatment program provides a basic level of dental care to children and youth identified as having urgent dental conditions. The program was expanded to include children up to their 18th birthday – the former cut-off was Grade 8, or a child's 14th birthday.

Healthy Smiles Ontario is a no-cost dental program providing prevention and basic treatment services to children and youth 17 years of age and under from low-income families. It gives eligible children and youth access to regular dental services.

What We Have Invested

Our government is committed to investing \$45 million annually to provide urgent care and preventative dental care for children in low-income families.

What We Have Achieved

From January 2009 to September 2013, Children In Need Of Treatment Expansion provided basic dental care (and general anesthesia, as required) to 18,306 youth ages 14-17 with urgent oral health conditions that may have otherwise gone untreated.

During the same period, over 20,500 general anesthesia services were provided to children ages five to 13, as part of their dental care. Healthy Smiles Ontario helps ensure that children from low-income families receive preventative and basic treatment dental services at no cost, enabling them to avoid urgent dental issues. Between October 2010 and September 2013, over 47,000 low-income children and youth were enrolled in the program.

Next Steps

Our government will integrate provincial low-income dental programs for children and youth into a single new Healthy Smiles Ontario Program in 2015.

Why It Matters

Children's oral health is important to their overall health. People with low incomes have tooth decay rates and treatment needs as much as three times greater than individuals with higher incomes. Poor oral health can affect a child's performance in school and self-esteem. Later, it can create barriers to employment for youth and adults due to the poor appearance of their teeth.

Did You Know?

Overall, oral health is connected to preventing diabetes and other chronic conditions, and can affect a child's school performance and self-esteem.

Eye See...Eye Learn

The Eye See...Eye Learn program encourages parents of junior kindergarten students in participating school boards to have their children's vision examined. The program helps vision disorders get detected earlier and reduces the impact uncorrected vision can have on early learning. There is no cost to parents. Ontario Health Insurance Plan optometrists participating in the program waive dispensing fees and industry optical partners provide free high-quality frames and lenses for children who need them.

What We Have Invested

In 2011, our government invested funding of \$1 million over five years for the Ontario Association of Optometrists to promote eye exams and administer the program.

Since 2011, our government has also invested \$300,000 in eye exams for children participating in the program.

What We Have Achieved

Between July 1, 2011 and June 30, 2013, Eye See...Eye Learn participating optometrists provided 7,260 eye exams and 2,073 free eyeglasses to junior kindergarten students. In 67 per cent of the cases, children were receiving their first eye exam, which underscores the effectiveness of the program.

The program started as a pilot in 2009-10 and has expanded to 1,986 schools with 86,174 children.

Next Steps

In July 2014, Eye See...Eye Learn will expand to include the Toronto region and by July 2015, it will include all school boards in Ontario that agree to participate.

Why It Matters

Correcting vision problems early on helps ensure that children are able to fulfil their potential.

Did You Know?

Encouraging eye exams for junior kindergarten students results in vision disorders being detected earlier, and reduces the impacts uncorrected vision can have on early learning.

Poverty Reduction Strategy in Action

"As a mom, I've done my best to always ensure my children have opportunities to learn, grow and excel. My daughter, Emma*, has always been a fun and vibrant child – full of personality. As a toddler, Emma enjoyed all the same things as her peers – playing in the playground, going for walks, and learning the alphabet. There was no indication that Emma saw any differently than any other child her age. Earlier this year, Emma was fortunate to receive a comprehensive eye exam through the Eye See...Eye Learn program. I'm so grateful for the program. Finding out about Emma's vision problem early meant that it never held her back."

*Name changed to protect privacy

Source: Eye See...Eye Learn 2nd Quarterly Report 2012-13

Supporting the Unique Needs of Aboriginal Communities

Aboriginal communities are disproportionately impacted by poverty. A range of historical, geographical, and cultural challenges present continued barriers for Aboriginal communities seeking to overcome poverty. Under the Poverty Reduction Strategy, we are committed to tailoring initiatives and programs to meet the unique needs of Aboriginal communities in Ontario. We are committed to partnering with Aboriginal leaders, organizations, and communities to ensure their input is considered and that we deliver services in a culturally appropriate and relevant manner.

Aboriginal Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder and Child Nutrition Program

The Aboriginal Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder and Child Nutrition Program is delivered to 180 Aboriginal communities, both on- and off-reserve, through service contracts with 20 Aboriginal and First Nation organizations. Each Aboriginal and First Nation organization is responsible for developing and delivering programming activities that are relevant to and meet the needs of their community. Programming is focused on three primary areas: support for families, health promotion and illness prevention, and training and capacity-building.

What We Have Invested

Our government invests \$4.4 million annually in the Aboriginal Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder and Child Nutrition Program.

What We Have Achieved

In 2012-2013, 38,823 clients were served and 2,941 events were held for 53,500 participants. The goal is to prevent Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder and to support individuals living with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder reach their full potential.

Next Steps

Our government is undertaking policy work to inform the development of a comprehensive cross-government approach to Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.

Poverty Reduction Strategy in Action

Teachers in communities supported by the Aboriginal Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder and Child Nutrition Program have observed improvements in students' ability to concentrate and in their academic performance following the program's implementation. Families have reported that community kitchens, with their provision of recipe books and cooking utensils, have contributed to increased self-confidence related to culinary skills, reduced grocery expenses, and increased quality time at family meals. Parents have reported that kids are less hyperactive and they are able to increase focus on tasks when processed food additives are removed and ingredients are chosen for meals made from scratch.

Source: Aboriginal Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder and Child Nutrition Program 2012-13 (Service Providers' Work Plans)

Akwe:go Urban Aboriginal Children's Program/Wasa-Nabin Urban Aboriginal Youth Program

The Akwe:go Urban Aboriginal Children's Program and Wasa-Nabin Urban Aboriginal Youth Program address the mental, physical, and emotional health and wellness of Aboriginal children and youth in a culturally relevant and holistic way. Akwe:go focuses on children aged seven to 12, while Wasa-Nabin targets youth 13 to 18 years of age living off-reserve.

These programs provide at-risk children and youth with supports, tools, and activities to help foster healthy lifestyle choices. Both Akwe:go and Wasa-Nabin services are community-based and tailored to meet the individual needs of the participants involved.

Aboriginal children, youth, and their families can access the Akwe:go and Wasa-Nabin Programs through their local Friendship Centres, as well as two non-Friendship Centre sites.

What We Have Invested

Our government allocates \$6.19 million annually to Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres to deliver both the Akwe:go and Wasa-Nabin Urban Aboriginal Programs.

What We Have Achieved

In 2012-13, the Akwe:go Urban Aboriginal Children's Program served 774 clients and 2,973 participants and the Wasa-Nabin Urban Aboriginal Youth Program served 604 clients and 2,576 participants.

Participants have been assisted with: depression, anger management, substance abuse, Attention Deficit Disorder, low self-esteem, and bullying. They have learned about healthy eating and physical activities, as well as appreciating their traditional culture and teachings. Participants have received school support, and gained a greater sense of family and community.

Poverty Reduction Strategy in Action

Fifteen-year-old Michelle* was referred to the Wasa-Nabin Urban Aboriginal Youth Program by her father in early 2013 because he was worried about her. She was being negatively influenced by her peers and using marijuana and alcohol. Since coming to the program at the Friendship Centre, Michelle has found her sense of identity through her culture. She is actively participating in cultural events, connecting with elders, and building positive relationships with other youths leading healthy lifestyles. Michelle took part in a traditional naming ceremony and since then has stopped using drugs or alcohol. The significant lifestyle changes, which she has made over a short period of time, hold the promise of her future success.

*Name changed to protect privacy

Source: Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres

Why It Matters

These supports help build the resiliency of children and youth who have limited access to the educational, emotional, and recreational supports needed to foster positive growth and optimism.

Did You Know?

Aboriginal children, youth, and their families can access the Akwe:go Urban Aboriginal Children's Program and Wasa-Nabin Urban Aboriginal Youth Program through their 29 local Friendship Centres and two alternate sites. These programs provide at-risk children and youth with supports, tools and activities that foster their inherent ability to make healthy lifestyle choices.

Supporting Mental Wellness

Poverty is both a cause and a consequence of poor mental health. Mental health and addictions issues affect all socio-demographic groups, but are higher among certain groups, including Aboriginal peoples, homeless individuals, and persons with disabilities. A lack of overall mental health is a great predictor of poverty.

The onset of mental illness often begins in childhood or early adolescence, which reinforces the importance of focusing on interventions for children and youth to try and address these issues early. The odds of a child or youth from a low-income family having a mental health problem are three times that of a child from a higher-income family. Left untreated, mental health issues can result in poor academic achievement, conflict with the law, substance abuse, and an inability to live independently and sustain employment. As such, mental health issues can serve to perpetuate the cycle of poverty.

Ontario's Comprehensive Mental Health and Addictions Strategy: Initial Focus on Children and Youth

We are working together to achieve the Comprehensive Mental Health and Addictions Strategy's goals to improve access to high-quality mental health and addictions services, strengthen the capabilities of workers, create a responsive and integrated system, and build awareness and knowledge about mental health issues within communities.

Since 70 per cent of mental health issues first appear in childhood or adolescence, we have focused the initial years of this long-term strategy on childhood mental health issues, to support the current and future wellbeing of the people of Ontario.

Launched in 2011, the strategy has targeted the provision of fast access to high-quality services, early identification and support, and helping vulnerable kids with unique needs.

What We Have Achieved

An estimated 35,000 more children, youth, and their families are already benefiting from the supports and services provided by over 770 newly hired mental health workers in schools, communities and courts, who are providing quicker and easier access to the right mental health services and supports.

New services and supports for children and youth in the past year include:

- 260 new workers in community-based child and youth mental health agencies to provide access to services closer to home;
- 175 additional new mental health workers in schools, who will provide children and youth with support to address their mental health needs;
- 144 nurses working with district school boards and local schools to support the early identification and treatment of students with potential mental health and/or addiction issues;
- 72 Mental Health Leaders in school boards to provide leadership and coordination;
- 21 new workers in the court system to keep youth out of the justice system and to refer them instead to community-based services;
- 19 new full-time Nurse Practitioner positions for pediatric and adult eating disorder treatment services;
- More than 80 new Aboriginal mental health and addictions workers in high-needs communities; and
- 18 Service Collaboratives implemented to improve transitions and support coordinated services for children, youth and adults.

Why It Matters

By identifying mental health issues and intervening early, we are helping to put kids back on track, leading to: better health outcomes, improved school attendance and achievement, enhanced participation in the workforce, more effective contributions to society, and cost savings to the health care and social services systems as well as society as a whole.

Did You Know?

Children and youth struggling with mental health challenges have different needs than adults. Creating a comprehensive mental health system that is accessible and provides the right supports to children, youth, and their families when they need them and as close to home as possible will help them to overcome and prevent future mental health difficulties, remain in school, and grow up to be healthy, productive citizens.

Next Steps

Strategy initiatives that will continue to roll out this year:

- Developing and implementing training supports for Aboriginal mental health and addictions workers to increase the supply of trained workers in Aboriginal communities;
- Implementing a directory of child and youth mental health services to help children, youth, and families find the right kind of service;
- Implementing an expanded and enhanced Tele-Mental Health Service to provide 800 more children and youth in rural, remote and underserved communities with access to mental health consultations through videoconferencing;
- Implementing a new Youth Suicide Prevention Plan; and
- Implementing Moving on Mental Health, an action plan to transform the experience of children and youth with mental health problems so that regardless of where they live in Ontario, they will know where mental health services are available in their communities and how to access the mental health services and supports that will meet their needs.



Engaging Youth

Why It Matters

The Youth Action Plan includes immediate actions that fill identified gaps in services as well as long-term strategies to address structural challenges, improve coordination and integration of services, and ultimately increase opportunities for youth and improve youth outcomes.

Did You Know?

Through the Youth Action Plan, more than 146,000 young people have benefited from the support and mentorship of a Youth Outreach Worker.

By increasing the amount of youth outreach workers, we expect an additional 5,000 youth province-wide to experience the same benefits.

Youth Action Plan

Adolescence can be an emotionally difficult time in anyone's life. Youth from low-income backgrounds often face even greater struggles in navigating their adolescent years than do their peers from higher-income backgrounds. The Youth Action Plan was released in 2012 to take an integrated approach to supporting youth living in underserved and disadvantaged communities by helping them to develop the skills and resilience needed to achieve success in school, and to go on to excel in other areas of their lives. It encourages existing leadership and resources in local neighbourhoods to collaborate on and support initiatives that will have a positive impact on the lives of our most vulnerable youth.

What We Have Invested

Our Youth Action Plan investments include the creation of the Youth Opportunities Fund that is being administered by the Ontario Trillium Foundation. The program, worth \$5 million per year, will provide grants and capacity-building to support youth-led, grassroots and community-based organizations to develop innovative projects that improve outcomes for at-risk youth (i.e., Aboriginal youth, racialized and newcomer, LGBTTTQ and/or youth with special needs). The program will also engage and benefit low-income youth, youth vulnerable of becoming and/or who are in conflict with the law, youth in care or who have experience with child welfare services, and/or youth who have dropped out of school or are at risk of dropping out. The Youth Opportunities Fund grants align with five priority outcomes in *Stepping Up: A Strategic Framework to Help Ontario's Youth Succeed*.

Under the Youth Action Plan, we have also invested an additional \$2.8 million in 2013-14 in the Youth Outreach Worker program to provide outreach services and build mentoring relationships with hard-to-reach youth, so that they can also access those supports and opportunities that have been shown to improve outcomes.

What We Have Achieved

Achievements under the Youth Action Plan include the expansion of the Youth Outreach Worker program, from seven to nine communities and from 62 to 97 workers across Ontario.

The expanded Jobs for Youth Program, which includes 530 new after school jobs, and expanded Youth in Policing Initiative, which includes funding for 270 new after school jobs, have also given more youth access to employment, including part-time jobs and opportunities for work throughout the year.

Next Steps

The first round of the Youth Opportunities Fund grants will be awarded in March 2014.

There are other initiatives under various stages of development to find innovative ways to reach out and connect with some of the province's most disadvantaged youth.

Stepping Up: A Strategic Framework to Help Ontario's Youth Succeed

Stepping Up is a first-of-its-kind roadmap to help the Ontario government and its partners step up and do more for youth. It sets out a common vision, guiding principles and a set of priority outcomes that are important for Ontario's youth. It is a framework to guide government's decision-making, and a resource for those who want to align their work with youth towards achieving common, evidence-based outcomes. *Stepping Up* identifies a number of cross-cutting actions, designed to establish an ecosystem for ongoing work and innovation to improve youth outcomes, including:

- Local Youth Action Collaboratives to reduce duplication and better coordinate community programs for young people. The initiative will include a local planning and collaboration hub to facilitate knowledge-sharing and a Community Project Grant fund to support foundational community projects that build a sense of collective purpose.
- The Youth Research and Evaluation Hub program, to provide research and evaluation resources, tools, supports, and services to Ontario's youth development sector in order to help improve outcomes for youth.
- The Premier's Council on Youth Opportunities, a new permanent council, to provide advice to government on how to better target existing programs and on new directions that could be pursued by the government. The council is made up of 25 individuals from a variety of communities, cultures and backgrounds, including front-line workers, representatives from youth-led organizations and youth.

What We Have Invested

- We will support Local Youth Action Collaboratives with up to \$1 million annually.
- The Youth Research and Evaluation Hub program will be supported with up to \$1.5 million annually.

What We Have Achieved

- The Premier's Council on Youth Opportunities was announced in March 2013 as part of the government's plan to ensure young people get the right training, can enjoy safe communities, and have access to exciting job opportunities. The council helps us better understand what young people need and what challenges those who are supporting them face. The council has provided input and advice on a number of government initiatives, including the Youth Jobs Strategy.

Next Steps

- Implementation of Local Youth Action Collaboratives and the Youth Research and Evaluation Hub program will begin in spring 2014.
- Recruitment to the Premier's Council on Youth Opportunities is ongoing.
- The first Annual Report on *Stepping Up*'s Profile of Youth Wellbeing will be released in summer 2014.

Why It Matters

Stepping Up is supporting those who are most marginalized (e.g., LGBTTQ youth, racialized youth, and Aboriginal youth) so they will be able to access opportunities that will support their development.

Did You Know?

Stepping Up complements the Ontario Youth Jobs Strategy, and is part of this government's plan to help youth succeed and build a fair and prosperous Ontario.

Poverty Reduction Strategy in Action

Tyrone Crawford recalls how participating in the Jobs for Youth Program provided him with opportunity and instilled a strong work ethic. "I'm from Windsor, Ontario. Like so many kids around my neighbourhood, my brother and I had to provide for ourselves the little things we wanted."

"That's why we joined the Jobs for Youth Program. I got a job at the Border City Boxing Club. I cleaned and vacuumed a lot. I would put the bag on sometimes and let the boxers take body shots at me. Seeing what they could do was an eye-opener and it made me work a lot harder when it came to football."

After graduating from high school in Windsor, Tyrone went on to become a defensive lineman while studying at Boise State University in Idaho. In 2012, Tyrone was drafted to the NFL as a third-round pick by the Dallas Cowboys. His work ethic garners attention from coaches and fans alike.

"The Jobs for Youth Program gave me an opportunity to develop my organizational skills, work in a team, learn how to be on time – and all the other life skills that are necessary to become successful in life," Tyrone said.

Source: Ministry of Children and Youth Services

Crown Ward Success Strategy

Crown wards face a range of challenges that may be related to a disruptive childhood or unmet physical and emotional needs prior to coming into the care of a children's aid society. Research has shown that former Crown wards have greater challenges in successfully transitioning to adulthood. Focused initiatives under the Poverty Reduction Strategy are aimed at supporting Crown wards and enhance their ability to succeed in becoming well-rounded and economically self-sufficient adults.

Ontario Child Benefit Equivalent

Funding equivalent to the Ontario Child Benefit provides educational, recreational, cultural, and social opportunities to children and youth in the care of children's aid societies and a savings program for older youth in care. The Ontario Child Benefit Equivalent is intended to support children and youth in care to reach their full potential and succeed later in life by providing them with increased opportunities to build resilience and to transition smoothly to adulthood. Youth participating in the savings program are assisted to acquire financial literacy skills to help prepare them for independent living.

Ontario Crown Ward Education Championship Teams

A total of 21 Crown Ward Education Championship Teams are supporting Crown wards across Ontario through partnerships with children's aid societies, school boards, colleges, universities, and employment services. The teams support Crown wards to remove barriers to success.

Ontario Crown Ward Postsecondary Application Fee Reimbursement Program

The Ontario Crown Ward Postsecondary Application Fee Reimbursement program covers the cost of application fees for Crown wards applying to college or university programs.

Living and Learning Grant

The Living and Learning Grant provides financial support to youth who were previously in the care of children's aid societies to help them complete postsecondary education and training programs. It provides youth aged 21 to 24 (inclusive) who are enrolled full-time in Ontario Student Assistance Program-eligible programs with \$500 a month during the school year to assist with living expenses. The grant became available in Fall 2013 for study periods beginning on or after August 1, 2013.

The Ontario Access Grant for Crown Wards

The Ontario Access Grant for Crown Wards covers 50 per cent of tuition (up to \$3,000 per year) for eligible current and former Crown wards and youth leaving care, in programs of two or more years in length, for up to four years. For eligible students in one-year programs, the Ontario Access Grant for Crown wards covers 100 per cent of tuition to a maximum of \$3,000. The grant can be used by students to study full-time in their first postsecondary program.

100% Tuition Aid for Youth Leaving Care

The 100% Tuition Aid for Youth Leaving Care program is available to current and former Crown wards and/or youth leaving care. The program covers 100 per cent of a student's tuition fees to a maximum of \$6,000 (i.e., 50 per cent of tuition fees are covered through the Ontario Access Grant for Crown Wards and/or the 30% Off Ontario Tuition grant, and the remaining cost is funded by participating institutions). The 100% Tuition Aid program is a joint initiative between the government and participating publicly assisted colleges and universities in Ontario and is available for up to four years of postsecondary study. For the 2013-14 academic year, 21 universities and eight colleges are participating in the program.

Youth-in-Transition Worker Program

The Youth-in-Transition Worker Program was launched in 2013-14. It offers funds to community agencies to provide support to youth aged 16 to 24 (inclusive) formerly in the care of children's aid societies, to help them identify, access, and navigate services to support their transition to adulthood. A Youth-in-Transition Worker connects youth to supports and resources in their community, including housing supports, educational resources, employment services and training, life skills training, and health and legal services.

What We Have Invested

In 2012-13, our government invested \$14.4 million in the Ontario Child Benefit Equivalent.

Ontario Crown Ward Education Championship Teams receive funding of \$1.6 million annually, while the Ontario Crown Ward Postsecondary Application Fee Reimbursement Program receives \$100,000.

So far this academic year, approximately 200 youth are benefiting from the Living and Learning Grant.

We are investing \$3.5 million in the Youth-in-Transition Worker Program in 2013-14.

What We Have Achieved

In 2012-13, more than 11,000 children and youth participated in the Ontario Child Benefit Equivalent Activities Program and almost 7,000 youth received savings under the Ontario Child Benefit Equivalent Savings Program to support their transition to adulthood. Through the initiative, these children and youth have been able to participate in activities they may not have otherwise been able to experience, including summer camps, receiving tutoring, and participating in numerous sports and cultural events. Former Crown wards also received up to \$3,630 in savings to assist with the costs of their basic needs after they leave care.

Next Steps

Our government continues to explore additional approaches to remove barriers encountered by Crown wards as they transition from childhood to young adults.

Why It Matters

Crown wards often face unique barriers that have an impact on their self-esteem and resiliency and can prevent them from succeeding in school and pursuing postsecondary education, training and employment. Providing additional supports to Crown wards will help them achieve their full potential.

Did You Know?

Ontario is the first jurisdiction in Canada to offer 100 per cent tuition aid at all Ontario universities to youth leaving the care of a children's aid society.

Poverty Reduction Strategy in Action

Brian*, a Crown ward, is a Grade 11 student who was contemplating going to university, but was intimidated by the high cost of a university education. He attended a workshop conducted by the Crown Ward Education Championship Team in his region. At the workshop, he learned of the support and options that were available to him and other Crown wards to help them pursue a postsecondary education. The information helped to alleviate Brian's anxiety and helped him to see university study as a viable option for his future. He has firmly decided to attend university after completing high school.

*Representative of the experiences of a youth supported by the Crown Ward Education Championship Teams.

Supporting Educational Excellence

Educational success is key to breaking the cycle of poverty, but children from low-income backgrounds face greater challenges in achieving it. At the same time, the educational requirements for jobs in Ontario have increased steadily over time and are expected to continue to rise.

Postsecondary education credentials are becoming more important for long-term economic success. Youth without a high school diploma are less likely to rise out of poverty. In order to break the cycle of poverty, a range of initiatives under the Poverty Reduction Strategy focused on helping children and youth succeed in elementary and secondary school, and at the postsecondary level. These initiatives support students' future success in finding gainful employment and attaining economic independence. The Poverty Reduction Strategy also supports adults in upgrading their educational skills to improve their potential for employment success.

Why It Matters

Students not only decreased their learning losses by participating in the Summer Learning Program, but they also recorded summer learning gains and narrowed achievement gaps between themselves and their peers. Also, parents who may not have formerly shown high levels of school participation have become more engaged with the school and their children's learning as a result of the program.

Summer Learning Program

The Summer Learning Program blends classroom learning with recreational activities, aimed at supporting school communities in low-income areas. The program offers children the opportunity to improve literacy and numeracy skills, gain self-confidence, and reduce their achievement gap. Piloted over three summers, the program focused first on literacy skills, and was then expanded to include numeracy skills during the summer of 2012.

What We Have Invested

Our government is investing \$12.6 million in the Summer Learning Program over three years. The funding has been increased to extend the program so that by 2015-16 all school boards in Ontario can participate.

What We Have Achieved

The Summer Learning Program has helped students retain what they learned during the school year, and has also helped them build upon their essential skills and achieve better results in reading, writing, and mathematics.

Next Steps

This year, four boards received additional funding for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit programs to support the expansion of the Summer Learning program in these communities: Rainbow, Keewatin Patricia, Simcoe County, and Lakehead district school boards.

Poverty Reduction Strategy in Action

What teachers are saying about the Summer Learning Program:

"Students seemed to be more confident in reading in front of their peers and were more engaged in their reading."

"Empowering students with the skills to be successful is extremely important if students are going to continue to take risks with their learning. I am passionate about this wonderful opportunity to make a difference in the life of a child."

What parents are saying about the Summer Learning Program:

"I think it will be a lot easier to keep him reading and doing some writing in his journal for the rest of the summer."

"My child now has much more confidence in her abilities. I think this will stick with her through life."

Source: Ministry of Education

Did You Know?

The Summer Learning Program funding was nearly doubled in 2013-14 to almost \$3 million, to provide support for elementary students who may be struggling across the province. The classes within the Summer Learning Program are a blend of academic learning and recreational programming aimed at school communities with lower socio-economic profiles.

Urban and Priority High Schools

The Urban and Priority High Schools initiative began in 2008-09. Common programs and supports under the initiative include: nutrition programs, after school activities, leadership training, and assistance to students struggling with basic needs. The program helps to create safer and more inclusive schools, where students and parents are more engaged.

What We Have Invested

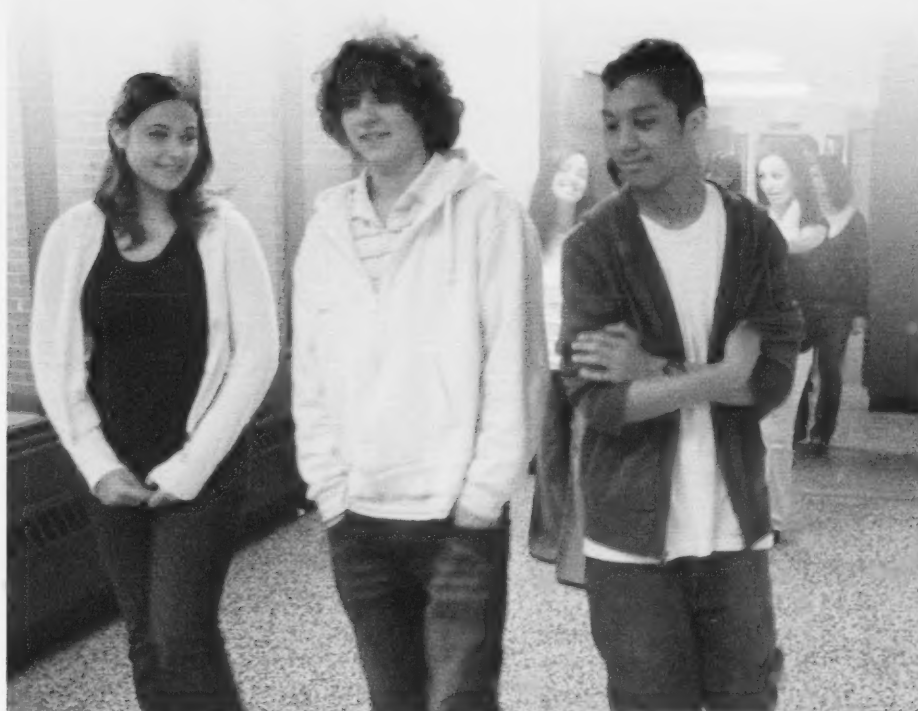
Under the Urban and Priority High Schools initiative, we provide \$10 million annually to 34 urban secondary schools across 12 school boards who are facing such challenges as poverty, criminal and gang activity, and a lack of community resources. Schools are selected based on a needs assessment and an action plan to invest the \$200,000 to \$500,000 that they receive.

What We Have Achieved

In schools supported by the Urban and Priority High Schools initiative, there has been a significant improvement in the percentage of students achieving the provincial standard or higher in the Grade 9 standardized applied math test. There has also been an improvement in Grade 9 and Grade 10 credit accumulation. Participating schools have also reported that the number of expulsions and suspensions has declined, that more students feel safe in their schools and their communities, and that parents are more engaged.

Next Steps

The 34 high schools involved in the Urban and Priority High Schools program will continue to implement and expand successful initiatives from the last five years, based on the same funding levels.



Why It Matters

The Urban and Priority High Schools initiative recognizes that students in disadvantaged neighbourhoods may need more support than others. That is why since 2007-08 we have been providing \$10 million annually to selected high schools in priority neighbourhoods. This type of investment is critical in levelling the playing field for all Ontario students, improving student outcomes and increasing student achievement.

Did You Know?

Urban and Priority High Schools work with families and community partners to create supportive conditions necessary for learning, including social, emotional and academic supports, a safe environment, and opportunities aimed at increasing engagement and academic achievement. Urban and Priority High Schools funding supports schools to hire more staff – such as safe school monitors, social workers and child and youth workers – and to offer nutrition and snack programs, student leadership and parent engagement programs, and programs to improve student achievement.

Poverty Reduction Strategy in Action

Urban and Priority High Schools

Thanks to funding from the Urban and Priority High Schools initiative, students at Clarke Road Secondary School can have their fees for university and college applications reimbursed. The number of applications from this school has increased from 24 in the 2007-08 school year to 77 in 2012-13.

Source: Principal, Clarke Road Secondary School, London, Ontario

Community Use of Schools: Priority Schools Initiative

The Community Use of Schools: Priority Schools Initiative provides targeted funding to select school boards in order to give not-for-profit groups free access to school space, outside of regular school hours, in those communities that need it most. This initiative provides not-for-profit groups with greater access and supports their ability to offer more affordable programming to students and families in their communities.

What We Have Invested

Our government is investing \$7.5 million in the Priority Schools Initiative for the 2013-14 school year as part of the overall Community Use of Schools \$42 million funding.

What We Have Achieved

Through the Priority Schools Initiative, a greater number of individuals and families have been able to access affordable programming in their communities outside of regular school hours. Greater access to programming in schools allows for stronger, healthier communities, and a more positive connection between communities and their local schools.

Next Steps

Through the Priority Schools Initiative, ongoing funding will be provided to 220 schools across 38 boards of education in Ontario.

Why It Matters

Through the Priority Schools Initiative, students and their families benefit from expanded access to programs and services that help to break the cycle of poverty.

Did You Know?

Strong communities can be a positive influence on the health, social inclusion, and economic prospects of their residents. Strong communities are better positioned to develop locally based solutions to address social needs.



Specialist High Skills Major

The Specialist High Skills Major is part of our Student Success strategy, focusing on providing engaging learning opportunities for all students and supporting students at risk of not graduating.

It is a specialized, Ministry of Education-approved program that makes learning more relevant and engaging for students by organizing it around an economic sector, while at the same time enabling students to meet the requirements of the Ontario Secondary School Diploma. The Specialist High Skills Major program also helps students identify and explore future career goals, and make more informed decisions about their next steps after secondary school, whether it is apprenticeship training, college, university, or the workplace. The program enables high school students to make the connection between their studies, the world beyond high school, and their future careers.

What We Have Invested

A total of \$25.3 million in funding for Specialist High Skills Major programs was approved for the 2013-14 school year.

What We Have Achieved

For the 2013-14 school year, there are an estimated 42,000 students participating in approximately 1,600 Specialist High Skills Major programs in more than 640 secondary schools. There has been rapid growth in the number of participating programs and students. Students are achieving higher levels of success as a result of this program.

Next Steps

Our government has committed ongoing support for this program, which is key to school success for many students.

Why It Matters

A highly educated, innovative and skilled labour force is critical to reducing poverty in Ontario.

The Specialist High Skills Major program gives students the opportunity to gain sector-specific skills and knowledge in engaging, career-related learning environments, and prepare in a focused way for graduation and postsecondary education, training or employment.

Did You Know?

Specialist High Skills Major programs are effective in helping students acquire the technical knowledge and skills that are of particular importance in specific economic sectors, and help them earn relevant certifications that may favourably position them for future employment.

Specialist High Skills Major students have the opportunity to identify, practice, and hone sector specific employability skills and work habits that are required to be successful in a given career.



Pathways to Education

Pathways to Education Canada is a charitable organization created to reduce poverty and its effects by lowering the high school dropout rate and increasing access to postsecondary education among disadvantaged and at-risk youth. Toronto's Regent Park neighbourhood is one of eight sites across Ontario in which the organization promotes student achievement and supports disadvantaged young people to fulfil their potential by staying in school, graduating, and going on to postsecondary studies. The support students receive includes tutoring, group mentoring and financial support with meals, transportation, and a bursary to assist with the cost of postsecondary education.

What We Have Invested

In January 2013, our government announced \$9.5 million in permanent annual funding for the Pathways to Education Canada organization.

What We Have Achieved

In 2012-13, there were over 3,700 students in the Pathways to Education program across the eight Ontario sites. Over 4,000 will be served in 2013-14. Close to 80 per cent of participants in the program have gone on to either college or university in four out of the eight sites. In Regent Park – the initial site – the youth dropout rate declined from 56 per cent (twice Toronto's average) to 10 per cent (lower than that of Toronto's highest-income neighbourhood).

The Pathways to Education program has contributed to social cohesion and has also helped to integrate immigrants into the community. A study also found that overall community health increased, the rate of teen pregnancies declined, and the smoking rate decreased among communities with a Pathways to Education program.

Next Steps

The Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities will meet with Pathways to Education Canada to finalize an ongoing agreement that will be in place after March 31, 2014.

Poverty Reduction Strategy in Action

Ryan* was a Grade 8 student in Scarborough who suffered from low self-esteem. He was academically and socially disengaged. He was restricted by his lack of access to transportation and other resources. Ryan's attitude changed when he joined the Pathways to Education program in Grade 9. He became close to program staff, who helped him rise above negativity. He began to dream and believe in himself.

Ryan's mentors helped him realize that he could combine his interest in music with education to make his career goals come true. He now plans to go on to university, and says, "Pathways is not all about education; it's about life."

*Name changed to protect privacy

Source: Pathways to Education Report: *Gearing Up for Graduation* – Spring 2013 report

Why It Matters

The dropout rate among Canadian youth has long been a major economic and social concern because high school dropouts earn lower wages, pay less tax, commit more crime, and have higher social service costs than those who graduate or who have achieved postsecondary education.

Did You Know?

Pathways to Education helped reduce the dropout rate of students in eight communities in Ontario. The young people who have successfully completed the program now have the education to succeed in society and lift themselves and their families out of poverty.

Parents Reaching Out Grants

The Parents Reaching Out Grants program is a grassroots initiative to support parents in identifying barriers to parent engagement in their own community, and finding local solutions to help more parents get involved in their children's learning at home and at school. Grants support enhanced parent engagement at the local, regional and provincial levels with a particular focus on parents who face barriers to parent engagement.

What We Have Invested

Our government is providing \$3.5 million in 2013-14 to support Parents Reaching Out Grants.

What We Have Achieved

In 2008-09, a portion of the Parents Reaching Out Grants initiative was refocused to help school councils target barriers that are experienced by parents in low socio-economic areas.

Since 2006, the government has awarded over 13,000 grants to school councils and 467 regional/provincial grants. This is a total investment of nearly \$21 million to increase parent involvement in support of student achievement and wellbeing.

In the 2013-14 application cycle, for the first time, 100 per cent of submissions from Priority Schools were approved for full or partial funding. We are pleased with the response from Priority Schools and will continue to promote the participation of Priority Schools in the program.

Next Steps

Implementation of the 2013-14 Parents Reaching Out Grants cycle will continue during the school year.

Why It Matters

Parent engagement is a critical part of improving outcomes for students in our schools. That is why we have invested nearly \$21 million since 2006 in Parent Reaching Out Grants. Through this investment, more parents are working to identify barriers to parent engagement and finding local solutions.

Did You Know?

In 2010, the Parents Reaching Out grants program received international recognition through a McKinsey and Company report analyzing high-achieving school systems across the world. Delegations from other high-performing school systems (Singapore and Finland, for example) are visiting Ontario to learn about Ontario's multi-pronged approach to parent engagement, including the Parents Reaching Out grant program.



Postsecondary Financial Supports

Ontario Student Assistance Program

The Ontario Student Assistance Program is an umbrella of 20 needs-based financial assistance programs provided to students who do not have the resources to fully finance their postsecondary studies.

30% Off Ontario Tuition Grant

The 30% Off Ontario Tuition grant helps students from low- to middle-income families pay for postsecondary education. The grant reduces tuition fees for eligible students at Ontario colleges and universities by an average of 30 per cent. A university student will receive about \$1,730 in 2013-14, while a college student will receive \$790 for tuition.

Cap on Tuition Increases

We are also limiting tuition increases to an average of three per cent for four years. This approach increases fairness and affordability for students and still provides institutions with the financial stability to provide a high-quality education. Beginning in 2013-14, tuition increases will be capped at three percent on average, which is one percentage point above the average inflation rate in Ontario over the past 10 years. Under the new tuition policy, for the 2013-14 academic year, the average increases for a basic first-year program are limited to no more than \$75 per year for about 83 per cent of college students and about \$170 per year for about 70 per cent of university students. Limiting tuition fee increases makes postsecondary education more accessible.

Repayment Assistance

Ontario continues to invest in assisting postsecondary students with their repayable student debt. Through the Repayment Assistance Plan, student loan recipients with low income after graduation can apply and qualify for reduced monthly payments or no payments. In addition, the government limits repayable debt to \$7,300 for each two-term academic year by forgiving any debt above that level through the Ontario Student Opportunity Grant.

What We Have Invested

In 2012-13, we issued more than \$1 billion in grants and loans, including the 30% Off Ontario Tuition Grant. It is anticipated that the number of recipients of Ontario Student Assistance Program funding will increase in the 2013-14 year by five per cent.

We are investing \$29 million in the Repayment Assistance Plan in 2013-14.

What We Have Achieved

About 371,000 students currently receive Ontario Student Assistance Program loans and grants, including students receiving the 30% Off Ontario Tuition Grant.

As of the 2012-13 academic year, about 230,000 college and university students have received the 30% Off Ontario Tuition Grant. It is estimated that approximately 300,000 students are eligible for the grant, and that take-up of the program will increase over time.

About 30 per cent of borrowers have participated in the Repayment Assistance Plan – most for six to 12 months. In addition, over 100,000 students have received relief through the Ontario Student Opportunity Grant. These programs provide recent postsecondary graduates with relief and with greater cash flow to maintain themselves after leaving school.

Next Steps

Beginning in Fall 2013, Ontario Student Assistance Program borrowers who start their own businesses are eligible for an additional six-month, interest-free grace period for repayment of their student loans.

Starting in the 2014-15 academic year, we will introduce a system-wide approach to coordinate the deadlines for tuition payment with the Ontario Student Assistance Program funding release dates. This will ensure that students are not asked to pay their tuition before their financial aid is available.

We will continue to review the Ontario Student Assistance Program for ways to simplify and streamline the application process for students and their families, and further reduce barriers to postsecondary education.

Why It Matters

Postsecondary financial assistance reduces the financial barriers to postsecondary education. It helps ensure that students have opportunities based on academic ability rather than ability to pay. It supports the transition from high school to postsecondary education for students from low- and middle-income families, as well as reducing overall student debt.

Did You Know?

Participants in the Repayment Assistance Plan are not required to pay more than 20 per cent of their family income towards their loans. And after 15 years, any remaining student loan debt is forgiven. For students with disabilities, remaining debt is forgiven after 10 years.

Adult and Continuing Education

We provide ongoing funding to 60 school boards to offer adult and continuing education programs that re-engage early school leavers and adults to complete their Ontario Secondary School Diploma, which is the minimum requirement for successful labour market participation. Adult and continuing education is also available to individuals seeking to complete specific courses required for entry into postsecondary institutions and apprenticeship programs.

What We Have Invested

Our government committed \$92.4 million in the 2013-14 school year to fund Adult and Continuing Education.

What We Have Achieved

Every year, about 85,000 students participate in a range of Adult and Continuing Education programs and successfully upgrade their skills to enhance their ability to contribute to a changing workforce.

Next Steps

Our government is funding three pilot initiatives in 2013-14.

The Hybrid Projects are being piloted at six school boards to better support and improve adult student retention and course completion rates in senior-level English and Math continuing education credit courses, using an approach that combines direct instruction and independent, online study with access to tutoring.

The Single Parent Projects are being piloted at six school boards to design and implement an innovative and flexible program for single parents facing many barriers to finishing high school and gaining the skills they need for the changing workforce, while continuing to manage their parental responsibilities. The pilots will integrate academic, parenting, life skills, and career counselling components with community services and supports that will enable single parents to finish high school and transition to further education and training, or to the workplace.

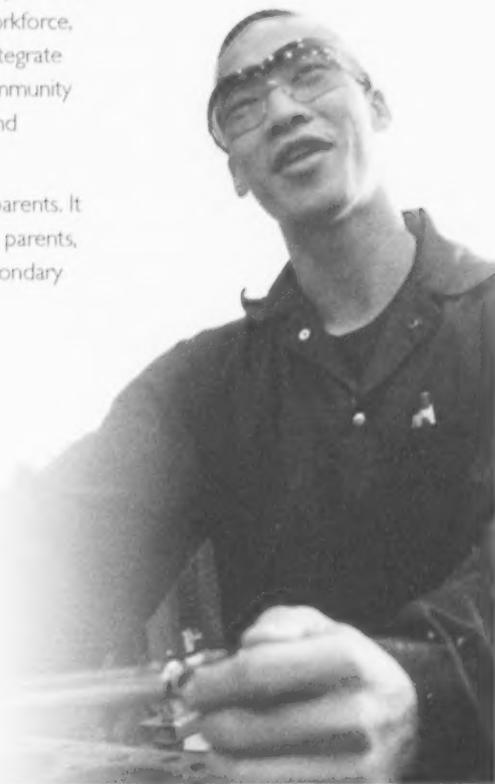
An initiative is being launched at three school boards to support teenage parents. It will look at the factors that make an effective and engaging model for teen parents, to help them complete high school and potentially continue on to postsecondary education.

Why It Matters

Adult and continuing education programs re-engage early school leavers and adults (including unemployed and laid-off workers, Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program clients, newcomers, and Aboriginal peoples) by providing them with the opportunity to return to school to complete their high school diploma, earn credits needed to transition to postsecondary education, training, and/or the workforce, and ultimately improve their labour force outcomes. Credit programs are provided at no (or minimal) cost to participants.

Did You Know?

There are almost 800,000 Ontarians of working age (25-64 years) without a high school diploma. Research shows that those who do not complete high school are twice as likely to be unemployed, three times more likely to spend time in prison, and five times more likely to require income assistance.



Opportunity For All

Safe and Secure Housing

Everyone needs a safe, secure, and affordable place to call home. Individuals and families living in poverty often face challenges finding suitable and affordable housing. When Ontarians are insecurely housed, it impacts on all facets of their lives. The Poverty Reduction Strategy includes a number of initiatives to help ensure people in Ontario have improved access to a safe, secure, and affordable place to live.

Poverty Reduction Strategy in Action

Investment in Affordable Housing

Sarah is grateful for the chance to focus on her grades, rather than worrying about having a secure place for herself and her family to live. When she was accepted to McMaster University, Sarah needed a place suitable for herself, her mother and nephew to live as they had no other relatives in Canada to offer assistance.

A social worker at a rehabilitation hospital in Toronto informed Sarah about accessible accommodations provided by the Good Shepherd organization. The well-maintained, fully furnished accommodations at Good Shepherd Square in Hamilton turned out to be perfect for Sarah and her family.

Sarah relishes the independence that the accessible apartment offers, including fully accessible entrances, doors and showers. Her current living accommodations give Sarah the peaceful environment she needs to focus on her studies. Her apartment is also conveniently located in downtown Hamilton, where Sarah and her family can easily access a range of community services, including wellness programs.

Source: Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing

Investment in Affordable Housing for Ontario

The Investment in Affordable Housing for Ontario program is a four-year program that will wrap up on March 31, 2015. The Investment in Affordable Housing program is made up of seven program areas that support the creation and repair of affordable housing, as well as the provision of down payment and rental assistance to households in need.

Through this program, low- to medium-income households can access new affordable rental housing, receive down payment assistance to own an affordable home, and repair and modify their home to improve their living conditions and foster independent living for seniors and persons with disabilities.

On March 21, 2013, the federal government announced a five-year renewal of its investment in the Affordable Housing program to 2018-19 at current levels.

What We Have Invested

The Investment in Affordable Housing program is providing \$480.78 million in federal and provincial funding over four years, ending in 2014-15.

What We Have Achieved

The Investment in Affordable Housing program will improve access to affordable housing that is safe, sound, suitable, and sustainable for households across Ontario. It is expected that the program will build and repair approximately 7,000 affordable housing units, while creating over 5,000 jobs for the province.

Ontario welcomes the five-year extension of the Investment in Affordable Housing program announced in the 2013 federal budget. This program is expected to continue providing funding for the construction and renovation of affordable housing units, as well as home ownership assistance, rent supplements, shelter allowances, and the renovation and repair of accommodations for victims of family violence. Ontario is working with the federal government in the development of an extension to the Investment in Affordable Housing program.

Next Steps

Negotiations have not yet begun for the Investment in Affordable Housing Program Extension.

Why It Matters

Investments in affordable housing ensure Ontarians in need have greater access to housing that is adequate, suitable and affordable.

Did You Know?

Since 2003, the government has invested \$3 billion in social and affordable housing. This is the largest investment in affordable housing in Ontario's history.

Ontario's Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy

We recognize that affordable housing can help people break the cycle of poverty. The Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy has several key components:

- *Housing Services Act, 2011*
- *Changes to the Planning Act, 1990*
- Launching the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative
- Launching an asset-building pilot
- Supporting Service Managers in the development of their local housing and homelessness plans, to be in place by January 1, 2014.

The overall goal of the strategy was to move to a person-centred, integrated approach in addressing the affordable housing needs of individuals and families.

What We Have Achieved

Under the Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy, the province consolidated five homelessness-related programs into one envelope through the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative, which began on January 1, 2013. The new program is designed to give Service Managers greater flexibility to use a range of housing and support options to address local priorities and better meet the needs of individuals and families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, including those who are on social assistance and low-income people. The Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative is a 100 per cent provincially funded investment that amounts to approximately \$246 million in funding for 2013-14.

Next Steps

Ontario's Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy has supported municipalities to more effectively manage their social housing portfolios and better respond to the needs of low-income households. The strategy requires municipalities to develop multi-year plans to address local housing and homelessness needs. These plans, to be in place by January 1, 2014, will support more locally responsive, integrated and accountable services. These plans will create clear linkages across the full spectrum of housing and homelessness-related programs, from homelessness prevention and supports to social and affordable housing. Starting on June 30, 2015, Service Managers will be required to report annually to the public on progress against their plans.

Why It Matters

Improving access to affordable housing is helping low-income Ontarians break the cycle of poverty.

Did You Know?

Access to affordable housing has been shown to improve health and education outcomes for families. It is recognized as an important foundation upon which families can secure employment, raise children and build strong communities.

Poverty Reduction Strategy in Action

Affordable Housing Changes Lives

John* has lived an eclectic life. The former nightlife aficionado and nightclub builder fell on hard times and found himself living in run-down rooming houses. His life has been transformed since he found a safe and secure place to live through the Christian Resource Centre in Toronto.

John lives in an apartment that came completely furnished "down to the salt shakers."

He is now an avid volunteer and integral part of the community at the Christian Resource Centre. He assists in the kitchen and with drop-in programs and helps other residents move furniture.

John said that he enjoys the sense of community at the Christian Resource Centre and the uplifting spirit of the staff and volunteers. He said he's glad to have turned his life around from "going nowhere" to doing outreach in the community and making plans to go back to school and even to run his own youth programs in the neighbourhood.

* Name changed to protect privacy

Source: Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing

Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative

As part of our government's Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy, we have consolidated five homelessness-related programs into a single municipally delivered program to better address local priorities. The Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative is focused on "Housing First" – an approach that assists people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness obtain and maintain permanent, affordable housing that is linked to flexible, appropriate support services.

The vision for the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative is to move beyond the traditional approach of dealing with emergency responses and promote a stronger emphasis on homelessness prevention and on providing stable housing for those who are homeless.

What We Have Invested

The Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative is a 100 per cent provincially funded investment of \$246 million in 2013-14.

What We Have Achieved

The Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative gives municipalities greater flexibility to address local priorities and better meet the needs of individuals and families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, including those who are on social assistance and low-income people.

For example, funding that in the past had to be used for emergency shelter beds can now be used to provide a person with more stable housing. Prior to the new program, the province provided municipalities with per diem funding for each shelter bed in use. Under the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative, those funds can now be used by the Service Manager to assist in transition to permanent accommodation with the necessary supports.

Next Steps

For 2014-15, the total funding allocation for the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative will increase to approximately \$251 million, which represents an increase of two per cent from 2013-14.

All Service Managers will receive an increase in their 2014-15 planning allocations.

Municipal Infrastructure Strategy – Municipal Infrastructure Investment Initiative: Social Housing Fund

The Municipal Infrastructure Investment Initiative was launched in 2012 in support of the Municipal Infrastructure Strategy. Through the Municipal Infrastructure Investment Initiative, Ontario is making \$750,000 in funding for strategic asset management planning available to 37 small-to-medium-sized municipalities' Service Managers over three years. This will support them in maintaining and administering the approximately 55,400 social housing units for which they are responsible across the province.

Why It Matters

Municipalities can now tailor the funding they receive under the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative to meet the local housing and homelessness needs in their community.

This means a more strategic and streamlined provision of services and support options will be available across the province, based on the realities of specific communities.

Did You Know?

The Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative combines funding from former separate housing and homelessness programs into a single flexible program.

Infrastructure Ontario Loan Program

The Infrastructure Ontario Loan Program offers affordable, longer-term, fixed-rate loans to support the development of local infrastructure projects around the province. The program provides efficient access to capital market financing for the following public bodies which might otherwise have difficulty obtaining traditional loans:

- Aboriginal Health Access Centres
- Community Health and Social Service Hubs
- Hospices
- Housing Providers
- Local Services Boards
- Long-Term Care Homes
- Municipal Corporations
- Municipalities
- Professional Arts Training Organizations
- Sports and Recreation Organizations
- Universities and Affiliated Colleges

The program allows borrowers to spread the costs of the project over a longer period of time than is typically acceptable to traditional lenders.

Not-for-profit organizations that benefit from the Infrastructure Ontario Loan Program provide important services to various population groups, including vulnerable populations such as seniors, Aboriginal peoples, and persons with disabilities. Without the Infrastructure Ontario Loan Program, many of these organizations would not be able to access financing to undertake their infrastructure projects, which would impede their ability to provide these core services.

What We Have Invested

Through the Municipal Infrastructure Investment Initiative, Ontario is providing \$750,000 in funding to 37 Consolidated Municipal Service Managers over three years to help support social housing asset management.

The Infrastructure Ontario Loan Program borrows from the financial market or through the Ontario Financing Authority on behalf of eligible entities on a full cost-recovery basis.

What We Have Achieved

Since 2003, the Infrastructure Ontario Loan Program has approved and executed \$7.02 billion in affordable loans to 348 eligible recipients to help them build or upgrade their infrastructure for approximately 1,900 infrastructure projects with a total project value of \$11.5 billion. A range of not-for-profit organizations benefit from the program.

Next Steps

The Infrastructure Ontario Loan Program has been expanded several times since its inception to include financing of infrastructure expenditures by municipalities, universities and some not-for-profit organizations. Further expansions of the initiative are being considered.

Why It Matters

Without our government's support to access capital financing, many not-for-profit organizations would not be able to access the necessary financing to undertake their infrastructure projects, which would impede their ability to provide core services to Ontarians in need.

Did You Know?

Taking advantage of historically low interest rates and Infrastructure Ontario's longer terms, Ottawa Community Housing Corporation partnered with Infrastructure Ontario for mortgage financing totaling \$28 million.

The agreement between the Ottawa Community Housing Corporation and Infrastructure Ontario extends the mortgages of eight properties and helps unlock equity that can be used to address the backlog of repairs. Funds will be used to make significant structural and mechanical repairs of a long-term nature.



Annual Rent Increase Guideline

The Annual Rent Increase Guideline is the maximum amount by which most landlords can increase a tenant's rent every year. The guideline is based on the 12-month average of the Ontario Consumer Price Index calculated by Statistics Canada and is capped at 2.5 per cent.

What We Have Achieved

The 2014 Rent Increase Guideline is 0.8 per cent and will provide tenants with more predictable and stable rents. The 2014 Guideline was announced on June 21, 2013 and applies to approximately one million tenant households in the province – about 87 per cent of the market.

Next Steps

The 2014 Guideline will apply to all rent increases in 2014.

Why It Matters

Capping rent increases at 2.5 per cent provides predictability and keeps rental housing affordable. This allows tenants to devote more of their income to savings, education and other essential items.

Did You Know?

The 2014 Rent Increase Guideline is 0.8 per cent, the second lowest in the history of rent regulation in Ontario.

This means that a tenant paying \$1,000 a month in rent will have their maximum rent increase capped at \$8 per month (\$96 per year).

[Landlords wishing to increase rents in excess of this amount will need to apply to the Landlord and Tenant Board for approval of an above guideline increase.]



Income Support and Minimum Wage

Everyone needs a basic income to meet their needs. The Poverty Reduction Strategy has demonstrated our commitment to addressing the need for income support and adjustments to the minimum wage to ensure that low-income Ontarians have the resources they require to successfully transition to financial independence.

Why It Matters

The Minimum Wage Advisory Panel is one of the ways our government is demonstrating our continued commitment to raising living standards for vulnerable workers and supporting Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy.

Did You Know?

Minimum wage was frozen for nine years under the previous government. Since 2003, our government has increased the minimum wage by 50 per cent from \$6.85 to \$10.25.

Minimum Wage Advisory Panel

In the 2013 Ontario Budget, we announced that we would establish an Advisory Panel to provide advice regarding future adjustments to Ontario's minimum wage. The panel will examine minimum wage models in other jurisdictions, as well as gather input from stakeholders and the public on the minimum wage policy and its impact on workers and business.

What We Have Achieved

Our government has implemented seven successive increases to minimum wage, from \$6.85 to \$10.25, starting in 2004. The Minimum Wage Advisory Panel will help develop a more consistent approach to addressing minimum wage increases in future.

The Minimum Wage Advisory Panel has:

- Received submissions in response to a consultation paper that was posted on the Ministry of Labour website (www.ontario.ca/minimumwagereview)
- Considered trends and developments related to minimum wage in other jurisdictions, including an analysis of approaches and mechanisms used in those jurisdictions
- Held internal consultations led by the Ministry of Labour in October and November 2013
- Held regional public consultations from September to November 2013

Next Steps

The government expects to receive the Minimum Wage Advisory Panel's report and recommendations in December 2013.



Social Assistance Review

When Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy was initially launched, our government committed to reviewing social assistance with the goal of removing barriers and increasing opportunity – particularly for people trying to transition to employment. The Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario released its final report to government in October 2012.

What We Have Invested

In the 2013 Budget, our government committed to investing more than \$400 million over three years to improve incomes, promote better employment outcomes, and increase fairness within social assistance.

What We Have Achieved

The 2013 Budget took initial steps to implement key recommendations from the Commission's report, recognizing that social assistance needs to be better focused on helping more people find employment, and providing recipients with improved financial security.

In our first year of reform, we have:

- Increased support by one per cent for individuals and families receiving Ontario Works and people with disabilities who rely on the Ontario Disability Support Program;
- Provided single adults without children receiving Ontario Works with a top-up of \$14 a month, for a total increase of \$20 a month or about three per cent;
- Allowed all social assistance clients to earn up to \$200 a month without affecting the level of their assistance;
- Promoted financial independence and security among social assistance clients by increasing the amount of assets they are allowed to retain, such as bank savings or a car;
- Simplified the rules on self-employment earnings and treatment of gifts; and
- Enhanced flexibility in how assets are treated in First Nation and remote northern communities to reflect their unique realities.

Next Steps

The initial changes introduced this year set the stage for long-term transformation of the social assistance system.

We are engaging our partners, clients and others for diverse input into our longer-term plan for reform. This provides an opportunity to share information about current system challenges and get advice on future program design.

The government is also working across ministries on the 2013 Budget commitment to establish a Partnership Council on Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities to champion hiring people with disabilities.

In addition, the government will engage with municipalities, First Nations and employment service providers on developing better ways to link social assistance recipients to employment and training opportunities, such as programs offered through Employment Ontario.

We are also pursuing other efforts that aim to promote better employment opportunities for people furthest from the labour market and improve client service experience, including:

- Having discussions with employers, service delivery partners, First Nations, labour representatives, advocates and people with lived experience on how to improve social assistance employment services and supports for those who are able to work, and to better connect clients, including people with disabilities, to the workforce;
- Piloting a pre-employment skills training project by the Hospitality Workers Training Centre to recruit 30 Ontario Disability Support Program clients to participate in training sessions in the kitchen of employer partners, leading to potential employment in the hospitality industry; and
- Piloting a standard assessment questionnaire for Ontario Disability Support Program clients to get a better understanding of their needs and goals in order to provide assistance, and refer them to other supports and services in their community as appropriate.

Poverty Reduction Strategy in Action

Social Assistance

Penny* had a personal goal – to work in a job preparing food for residents of a local nursing home.

At the age of 49, Penny believed she could have a new career and hoped that one day she could fully support herself.

Penny had been looking for work for two years and she had her Personal Support Worker certificate, but could not find suitable employment in the field due to the demands of the job. So, she took cleaning jobs, while receiving assistance from the Ontario Disability Support Program.

With the encouragement and support of the program, Penny is on her way to attaining a full-time, well-paying job.

She completed a Food Handling program in October 2013, graduating with top marks in her class. Penny is now doing a placement at a nursing home and getting job interviews.

Penny is excited about her future and looks forward to not needing Ontario Disability Support Program benefits once she lands a full-time job.

*Name changed to protect privacy

Source: Ministry of Community and Social Services

Why It Matters

People turn to social assistance when they have no other options. There is broad agreement that the system needs to be better focused on helping more people find employment, and providing recipients with improved financial security.

Did You Know?

A single person can now have up to \$2,500 in assets compared to \$606 in 2012 and still be able to get the help they need from Ontario Works.

Social assistance recipients who are working can now earn up to \$200 a month without reducing their assistance.

Ontario Personal Income Tax Reductions

Achieving our poverty reduction goals requires that we reduce the economic burden on low-income Ontarians by putting more money in their pockets, so that they can provide for their families and successfully participate in the workforce.

- Under the **Ontario Tax Plan for Jobs and Growth** announced in 2009, the government has cut personal income tax and increased relief for people through tax credits.

What We Have Achieved

Nine out of 10 Ontario taxpayers received a permanent tax cut in 2010. Over 90,000 Ontarians were removed from the tax rolls altogether.

The government has also enhanced and streamlined the payment of its former sales tax and property tax credits and has introduced new relief for energy costs, children's activities and home improvements to increase accessibility and safety for seniors. These changes will deliver \$2.5 billion of additional relief in 2013-14, primarily to low- to moderate-income people.

Low- to moderate-income families and single people are now also better served by a more streamlined and regular payment schedule. Since July 2012, the payments of sales tax and property tax credits and the relief for energy costs have been combined into the Ontario Trillium Benefit that is paid in monthly instalments throughout the year to help people meet their expenses as bills arrive.

Through the Ontario Trillium Benefit, low-income Ontarians can get:

- Up to \$278 a year for each adult and child in a family, to help with the sales tax they pay;
- Up to \$1,097 a year for seniors and up to \$963 a year for non-seniors, to help with the sales tax they pay on energy and with property taxes; and
- Up to \$139 a year for single people and up to \$214 a year for families living in the North to help them with their higher energy costs.

The 2013 Ontario Trillium Benefit alone will provide an estimated \$2.5 billion to about 4.1 million low- to moderate-income families and single people.

Low- to moderate-income seniors can also now get additional tax reduction through the Ontario Senior Homeowners' Property Tax Grant that provides grants of up to \$500 a year to help low- to moderate-income senior homeowners pay their property taxes. The 2013 grant is estimated to provide \$210 million in property tax reduction to eligible senior homeowners.

Next Steps

Our government continues to explore further ways to alleviate the tax burden for those Ontarians who are most in need.

Why It Matters

Putting money back in the pockets of Ontarians, particularly those living in poverty, gives them more to spend in other areas to better meet their needs and wellbeing.

Did You Know?

Over five years, the Ontario Senior Homeowners' Property Tax Grant is expected to provide about \$1 billion in property tax reduction to more than 600,000 seniors.

Making Ontario More Accessible

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005

The *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* establishes a framework for achieving an accessible Ontario by 2025. This goal will be achieved through the development, implementation and enforcement of mandatory accessibility standards that apply to the public, private and not-for-profit sectors. Accessibility standards are the rules that businesses and organizations in Ontario must follow in order to identify, remove, and prevent barriers to accessibility.

Under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*, five accessibility standards are now law in key areas of daily living:

- Customer Service;
- Information and Communications;
- Employment;
- Transportation; and
- Design of Public Spaces.

Implementation of these accessibility standards will create opportunities for the reduction of poverty among people with disabilities. For example:

- The Employment Standard requires businesses and organizations to make their employment processes accessible, including recruitment, career development and advancement, and return-to-work so that people with disabilities can better access employment commensurate with their skills, education and experience.
- The Information and Communications Standard requires educational institutions to take steps to help students with disabilities reach their full potential, including providing educational materials in accessible formats and providing accessibility awareness training to educators.
- The Transportation Standard requires transportation providers to make their services accessible so that people with disabilities can more easily travel to interviews, school, and places of employment.



What We Have Achieved

Five accessibility standards are now law under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*. This means that businesses and organizations in Ontario are now legally required to take specific steps to become accessible to people with disabilities.

In 2010, the broader public sector indicated that they are complying with their requirements under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*. Our government is committed to building awareness and increasing compliance among private and not-for-profit organizations.

Through the EnAbling Change program, the Accessibility Directorate of Ontario has partnered with over 50 organizations across nine sectors. We have created accessibility awareness among children and youth, emphasized the importance of accessible sports and recreation for children and families, as well as developed resources to create awareness of mental health issues from youth to adults. Current partnerships include the Canadian Paralympic Committee, Canadian Mental Health Association, and Ontario Council of Universities. In addition, the Accessibility Directorate of Ontario has partnered with the Ontario Municipal Services Association to develop a best practice guide to consulting people with disabilities.

Next Steps

Implementation of the five accessibility standards is being phased in over several years to give businesses and organizations time to build accessibility into their existing plans and processes.

Our government will continue to oversee the effective implementation of accessibility standards, including educating businesses and organizations on their requirements and ensuring that they comply with them.

To keep Ontario on target to achieving accessibility by 2025, our government has appointed Mayo Moran, Dean and James Marshall Tory, Professor of Law at the University of Toronto, to lead the second review of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*. Our government looks forward to receiving Dean Moran's report and recommendations on how to best achieve the goals of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005*.

Why It Matters

Currently, one in seven Ontarians has a disability, and this number is expected to rise to one in five by 2036 as the population ages. Creating a more accessible society will significantly improve the lives of Ontarians with disabilities. The Martin Prosperity Institute estimates that with the implementation of accessibility standards, employment income for people in Ontario with disabilities could increase overall by \$618 million.

The improvements to accessibility will also have a significant impact on society as a whole. The Institute estimates that, with the implementation of accessibility standards, education levels of people with disabilities could better match those of people without disabilities, resulting in an \$85 to \$200 increase per capita in Ontario's Gross Domestic Product. Helping to lift people with disabilities out of poverty will benefit them as individuals as well as their families, and help to build a stronger economy in Ontario.

Did You Know?

It is estimated that improved accessibility in Ontario can help generate up to \$9.6 billion in new retail spending and \$1.6 billion in new tourism spending by making it easier for people with disabilities to visit Ontario and access goods and services.

Removing Barriers to Employment

In order to break the cycle of poverty, it is essential to remove some of the barriers individuals face in finding employment. The Poverty Reduction Strategy includes a number of initiatives that support people who are unemployed or seeking to retrain or upgrade their skills to find more secure employment. It also seeks to protect the most vulnerable workers.

Youth Jobs Strategy

Ontario is helping young people across the province by creating 30,000 job opportunities through the new Youth Jobs Strategy. The Youth Jobs Strategy comprises four funds to support initiatives that will promote employment opportunities, entrepreneurship and innovation for youth in Ontario.

What We Have Invested

- **Ontario Youth Employment Fund (\$195 million):** To provide unemployed youth facing barriers to employment with four- to six-month placements – training and work experience that will help them succeed at future long-term employment.
- **Youth Skills Connections (\$25 million):** To promote partnerships among business, labour, educators and youth to identify and solve skills development issues.
- **Youth Entrepreneurship Fund (\$45 million):** To support youth through entrepreneurship, providing mentoring, training and advisory services and access to capital programs to help youth become job creators rather than job seekers.
- **Youth Innovation Fund (\$30 million):** Focused on transferring knowledge and innovation from postsecondary institutions into the economy through experiential learning, internships and student entrepreneurship.

What We Have Achieved

The Ontario Youth Employment Fund was announced in July 2013 and opened for applications on September 24, 2013.

- As of November 29, 2013, 4,254 placements have started.

Over 150 additional placements were added to the Summer Company program with funding from the Ontario Youth Entrepreneurship Fund.

- Applications for summer 2014 opened on November 22, 2013.

The Youth Investment Accelerator Fund launched on October 16, 2013, and has made three investments of \$250,000 to date in youth-led technology businesses.

Youth Skills Connections, the Ontario Youth Entrepreneurship Fund and Ontario Youth Innovation Fund were officially launched on October 16, 2013, with an announcement by the Premier.

- The selection and contracting of program delivery partners is currently underway.

The Youth Jobs Strategy has a focus on helping youth facing multiple barriers to employment, youth living in high-needs communities, and youth with disabilities. Program providers are required to develop an outreach plan to strongly encourage participation from youth from these population groups and report to the province on participation outcomes.

The Ministry of Economic Development, Trade and Employment is actively engaged in inter-ministry outreach and has involved inter-ministry colleagues in the evaluation processes for program providers.

Further, specific programs have been designed to provide tailored interventions to vulnerable populations. Strategic Community Entrepreneurship Projects provides grants to not-for-profits that help 15- to 29-year-olds from high-needs communities and/or vulnerable populations start a business. The program fills the gap for young people who want to be entrepreneurs, but who are not eligible for other self-employment programs. Youth Skills Connections-Community Stream funds not-for-profits and public sector organizations to deliver collaborative projects that provide training and skills development to increase the capacity of vulnerable youth and help them overcome barriers to employment (e.g., a criminal record, poverty), resulting in long-term employment opportunities for youth enrolled in the program.

Next Steps

Confirmation of program delivery partners and program guidelines will be completed in January/February 2014.

Programs will open to youth on a rolling basis, with some commencing in November/December 2013 and others coming online from February 2014 through the spring.

Why It Matters

The unemployment rate for Ontario youth remains unacceptably high and more than double that of workers aged 25-64.

For young people facing multiple barriers to employment – Aboriginal youth, recent immigrants, visible minorities, and young people with disabilities – the rates are even higher.

Our future prosperity depends on giving young people the right skills, experiences and supports they need to succeed in today's global economy.

Did You Know?

To help young people and employers access these programs, Ontario has launched a website – www.ontario.ca/youthjobs – where youth can use a quick search tool to get a customized list of programs available to them.

The site also provides resources for employers looking to strengthen their workforce by hiring skilled youth.



A New Direction: Ontario's Immigration Strategy

In November 2012, our government released *A New Direction: Ontario's Immigration Strategy*, which sets a new direction for how the province selects, welcomes, and helps immigrants. This vision will help build a highly skilled workforce and support the development of strong communities where all Ontarians can thrive. The strategy aims to enhance the economic and social outcomes for immigrants, many of whom face higher rates of poverty than the general population. Many programs discussed in the Immigration Strategy will help to achieve this goal, including:

- Bridge Training programs, which help skilled newcomers get licensed and gain employment in their fields. The Bridge Training programs provide occupation-specific training and pre-employment services links to the sector or occupation that skilled newcomers need to continue their careers in Ontario.
- The Adult Non-Credit ESL/FSL Language Training Program, which supports immigrants in gaining proficiency in English or French as a second language. The program includes job-specific language training classes, which cover a wide range of job sectors and provide language training in a classroom or in the workplace.

What We Have Invested

Our government will be investing more than \$60 million over the next three years in Ontario's Bridge Training program and over \$60 million annually in the Adult Non-Credit ESL/FSL Language Training Program.

What We Have Achieved

Examples of recent Bridge Training program successes include:

- 93 per cent of the graduates of the Access to the Early Childhood Education Field Bridge Training program have become licensed to practice as Early Childhood Educators and, within one year, 73 per cent have gone on to find jobs in the field.
- Ryerson University's International Midwifery Pre-Registration Program has helped 92 per cent of graduates obtain employment as midwives.

About 120,000 learners are enrolled annually in the Adult Non-Credit ESL/FSL Language Training Program.

Next Steps

Following the launch of the Immigration Strategy in November 2012, the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration has been leading a phased-in implementation of initiatives. The ministry will release an annual progress report in early 2014 that will provide an update on progress made in the first year of implementation.

Why It Matters

Helping new immigrants gain a better foothold in Ontario helps to build a stronger economy by increasing the availability of skilled workers. Successful newcomers and their families help Ontario leverage the global economic connections of its diverse communities, which benefits the province as a whole.

Did You Know?

Today, our population includes people from more than 200 countries, who speak as many as 130 languages. Everyone benefits from diversity—individuals, employers, and the community.

Second Career Program

The objective of the Second Career program is to provide laid-off, unemployed individuals with skills training to help them find employment in occupations with demonstrated labour market prospects in Ontario.

Upon training completion, employment service providers follow up with Second Career program clients at four different points in time: upon their exit, three months later, six months later, and 12 months later.

What We Have Invested

In 2013-14, the planned investment in the Second Career program is \$211.7 million.

What We Have Achieved

More than 10,500 clients will be supported in 2013-14 through the Second Career program. More than 95 per cent of Second Career clients who completed the program prior to June 2013 responded that the skills training helped them with their future employment.

Since its inception in June 2008, more than 68,000 Second Career clients have been assisted with their career goals.

Next Steps

The Second Career program will continue to follow up with former clients at various points in time post completion, in order to continue to track the impact and success of the program.

Poverty Reduction Strategy in Action

Jasmine*, a 31-year-old single mother with one child, was recently laid off from her order processor job. She is currently receiving Employment Insurance benefits. Jasmine didn't complete high school, but her participation in the Second Career program is providing a chance to build a new life.

She was approved to attend a Medical Office Assistant Program for 45 weeks at the Academy of Learning in Brampton. Jasmine received Second Career funding of \$17,518, including \$9,015 to pay for her tuition.

Jasmine is looking forward to graduating from the program and starting a new career that will provide security and independence for herself and her child.

*Name changed to protect privacy

Source: Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities

Why It Matters

We invest in Ontarians' knowledge and skills to ensure they have maximum opportunities for success. This is done by: providing the highest quality of service and support to help individuals meet career and/or hiring goals; providing opportunities to make it easier for individuals to improve their skills through education and training; and working with employers and communities to build the highly skilled and highly educated workforce Ontario needs to be competitive.

Did You Know?

Second Career helps unemployed, laid-off workers get skills training that will assist them to find work in occupations with demonstrated labour market need.

Follow up data shows that 80 per cent of Second Career clients found employment within a year of completing training. More than 93 per cent of clients said the skills training they received helped them find work.

Women in Skilled Trades and Information Technology Training Program

The Women in Skilled Trades and Information Technology Training Program provides training to low-income women to learn new skills, earn good wages, and create better futures for themselves and their families. Every two years, the Ontario Women's Directorate issues a request for proposals and selects training organizations to deliver the programs.

The programs qualify women for jobs in high-growth information technology and skilled trades sectors. They help them qualify for further training or achieve employment in higher-paying, non-traditional occupations, moving them toward greater economic security. Seven programs, including one for francophone women and two for Aboriginal women, are currently being offered in eight locations across Ontario.

What We Have Invested

The government is investing about \$2.1 million in the Women in Skilled Trades and Information Technology Training Program in 2013-14.

What We Have Achieved

There are about 200 women participating in the Women in Skilled Trades and Information Technology Training Program in 2013-14. About 80 per cent of the graduates of the program either secure employment or go on to further training.

Next Steps

The current programs are expected to run into 2014. An invitation for applications for new programs was issued in fall 2013 for programs that will run in 2014-15 and 2015-16.

Why It Matters

As a result of the initiative, low-income women are prepared for well-paid employment in the information technology and skilled trades sectors.

The program helps low-income women across Ontario get the training they need to earn a good wage, and create a better future for themselves and their families.

Did You Know?

By supporting the Women in Skilled Trades and Information Technology training program, our government is helping low-income women gain new skills, new careers and new opportunities.

Since 2003, more than 2,100 women have been trained in the information technology and skilled trades sectors through our Women in Skilled Trades and Information Technology program. This support allows low-income women in Ontario to get the training they need to get better paying jobs.



Employment Training for Abused/At-Risk Women

Employment Training for Abused/At Risk Women is an initiative of the Ontario Women's Directorate. It helps low-income women who have experienced or are at risk of domestic violence to develop new skills and learn how to find employment, in order to help them build economic independence.

What We Have Invested

Our government invested approximately \$4.3 million in the initiative that is delivered by various organizations, including those targeting Aboriginal communities. Funding for the initiative is committed to 2013-15.

What We Have Achieved

As of March 31, 2013, 623 women had completed their training. Of those who had completed their training, 462 or 74 per cent either found employment or went on to further training and education. Currently, there are 10 programs where abused/at-risk women are receiving employment training and supports to increase their employment potential.

Next Steps

The current training programs are funded to 2015. The next round of funding will start in 2015-16.

Why It Matters

The initiative provides training for women so that they can find employment. It allows them to break the cycle of poverty by building their economic independence.

Did You Know?

Since 2006, the Employment Training Program for Abused/At Risk Women has helped 2,137 women enter training. 80 per cent of women enrolled have completed the training, and 79 per cent of women who have completed the training have found employment or gone on to further training.

Poverty Reduction Strategy in Action

May* was attending her first year of nursing school when she finally summoned the courage to leave her abusive home. The stress of trying to put the pieces of her life back together was overwhelming. She dropped out of the program and bounced around from one menial job to another until she arrived at the YWCA. May knew she needed to be more focused and to improve her computer skills. She attended the YWCA employment training program regularly and welcomed the support and encouragement from the other women. May took a co-op placement in a medical records department. After successfully completing the placement, May was offered a job as a medical office administrator.

**Name changed to protect privacy*

Source: Manager, Employment Programs, YWCA of Greater Toronto



Microlending for Women in Ontario Program

The Microlending for Women in Ontario Program was established in 2012 by the Ontario Women's Directorate. It is helping low-income women build and grow their own businesses. Women receive financial literacy training, entrepreneurial mentoring and skills development, as well as life skills support to help them succeed. Women who become business-ready within these programs will be eligible to receive small loans (microloans) to start their businesses.

What We Have Invested

Funding was approved of up to \$760,550 over three fiscal years (2012-2013 to 2014-2015) for six agencies to deliver microlending initiatives. The program (2012-2015) will be providing an estimated 174 loans, and will be helping an anticipated 635 low-income women acquire the skills needed to start and run a business.

Next Steps

The current microlending program is funded to 2015.

Employment Ontario's Employment Service

Employment Ontario's Employment Service offers a range of resources, supports, and services to respond to the career and employment needs of individuals and the skilled labour needs of employers. It helps put individuals on a stronger path to higher skills training and employment. The program offers a highly flexible toolkit of services that can be customized to a client's particular needs.

What We Have Invested

Our government invested over \$314.5 million in the Employment Ontario Employment Service initiative in 2013-14.

What We Have Achieved

The Employment Service provided services to 664,310 clients in 2012-13. Since its implementation in August 2010, 62 per cent of clients have found employment through the Employment Service and another 16 per cent have registered for further education or training. Employment Service providers have consistently achieved a client satisfaction rating of over 98 per cent.

The Employment Service network consists of 171 service providers with 324 funded service delivery sites across Ontario. There are also a number of Employment Service sites that provide visiting and specialized services in their communities, as needed. This brings the total number of points of service to over 400.

Next Steps

Launched in September 2013, the new Youth Employment Fund's services will be delivered by the Employment Service delivery network.

Why It Matters

The initiative provides microloans to low-income women to help them start and grow their own businesses and become successful entrepreneurs. It helps vulnerable women develop a variety of entrepreneurial skills and build their economic independence.

Did You Know?

The Microlending for Women in Ontario program is providing over 630 low-income women with the skills training they need to start and run a business and is providing close to 175 loans to help them embark on a successful path as entrepreneurs.

Why It Matters

The Employment Service allows Ontarians to find the programs and services they need, such as career planning, job search and job retention, in one place.

The Employment Service helps service providers to be more adaptable and responsive to changing economic conditions and better equipped to meet client, community, and stakeholder needs in each community across the province.

Did You Know?

Employment Ontario Employment Service is a one-stop service that makes it easier for workers to get help finding work, or training and education in their communities.

In the past year, the Employment Ontario network helped approximately one million people in our province, including youth, newcomers, Aboriginal people, apprentices, people with disabilities, and 90,000 employers.

Employment Protection for Foreign Nationals Act (Live-in Caregivers and Others), 2009

On October 21, 2009, we introduced the *Employment Protection for Foreign Nationals Act (Live-in Caregivers and Others), 2009* to ensure that foreign nationals employed as live-in caregivers are properly protected under provincial law. The legislation, which came into force in March 2010, prohibits employers and recruiters from charging fees to foreign nationals working or seeking to work in Ontario as live-in caregivers. The legislation also prohibits the practice of taking a caregiver's personal documents such as a passport and work permit, a practice that previously prevented some caregivers from leaving unscrupulous employers and finding new employment.

What We Have Achieved

By banning all fees charged to live-in caregivers by employers and recruiters, the legislation is reducing the need for prospective live-in caregivers to take loans (often at high interest rates) to cover the costs of getting employment in Ontario. By prohibiting the practice of taking a caregiver's personal documents, such as a passport and work permit, live-in caregivers can no longer be blocked from seeking new employment if necessary.

From April 1, 2012, to March 31, 2013, 24 *Employment Protection for Foreign Nationals Act*-related claims were investigated and three violations were found.

Next Steps

Our government continues to explore ways to best protect the province's most vulnerable workers.

On December 4, 2013, our government introduced Bill 146, the *Stronger Workplaces for a Stronger Economy Act, 2013*. If passed, the bill would amend the *Employment Protection for Foreign Nationals Act (Live-in Caregivers and Others), 2009* to extend protections that currently apply only to live-in caregivers to all foreign employees who come to Ontario under an immigration or temporary foreign employee program.

If passed, the bill would also:

- Eliminate the \$10,000 cap on the recovery of unpaid wages and extend the time limit for recovery of wages from six- and 12-month periods to two years. This would help keep more disputes out of the court system, saving both employees and businesses time and money.
- Make temporary help agencies and their clients liable for employment standards violations, helping to decrease the number of companies that hire individuals solely to work in unsafe conditions.

The government is also boosting the number of enforcement officers in the province to ensure more workplaces are inspected and employees are protected.

Why It Matters

When Temporary Foreign Workers come to our province to work, they need to be protected against having essential documents like passports taken away from them, and being charged recruitment fees.

Did You Know?

Proposed changes to the Employment Protection for Foreign Nationals Act (Live-in Caregivers and Others), 2009 would extend protection to cover all foreign workers, and require that they be given an information handout about their rights.

Stronger Economic and Social Foundations

Supporting Social Enterprises

It is important to address breaking the cycle of poverty on a community scale. Many organizations within our community are committed to improving the lives of low-income Ontarians and creating opportunities for success. Our government is committed to continuing our partnerships with community organizations, the private sector, stakeholders, and other governments at all levels to develop programs and services that build strong communities and help lift people in the province out of poverty.

Why It Matters

Ontario's not-for-profit organizations help drive our economy, contributing close to \$50 billion and more than one million jobs across the province. They also provide important services to families in our communities. The Partnership Project aims to build a stronger partnership between the not-for-profit sector and government so that we can build stronger communities together.

Many not-for-profit sector organizations work on poverty reduction-related issues (e.g., employment services, settlement services) and provide support to families (child care, after school, seniors' services, and recreation programs). By strengthening its relationship with government and building capacity, the sector can more effectively serve its clients in all areas, including poverty reduction.

Partnership Project/Partnership Grant

The Partnership Project was launched in 2010 to strengthen our partnership with the not-for-profit sector, which includes over 53,000 arts, environment, health, sport, and community organizations. In March 2011, following an eight-month consultation process, the Partnership Project report was released. It provides a concrete set of six recommendations which have been adopted as our strategy to help renew, streamline, and modernize the government's relationship with the not-for-profit sector.

The Partnership Grant Program focuses on building sector capacity by investing in projects with local, regional, and provincial outcomes. Projects support intra-sector cooperation, communication, and network-building to address structural, foundational, and systemic issues facing the not-for-profit sector in Ontario.

What We Have Invested

Our government approved funding of \$200,000 in 2013-14, 2014-15, and 2015-16 to the Maytree Foundation so that the organization can work with partners to fight poverty and to promote equity and prosperity through leadership-building in communities.

What We Have Achieved

- The province gathered representatives from the not-for-profit and corporate sectors to participate in a Partnership Forum, share ideas, and guide current and future government action.
- Ontario is creating a not-for-profit online channel that will provide easy access to details on government funding, as well as legal and regulatory information.
- We are investing in research on the not-for-profit sector in Ontario to improve our understanding of its size, scope, and contributions, and to support future policy and program development.
- Our government is working to find ways to reduce administrative burdens for not-for-profits, and to ensure that other government initiatives take into consideration the not-for-profit sector.
- The Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration recently participated in the government's Open for Business sector strategy process with the not-for-profit sector and various ministries to reduce administrative burden and "red tape."

Next Steps

The province recently released a Partnership Project Progress Report, which provides information on the progress that has been made in recognizing and strengthening the sector. The report's findings will inform future collaboration and activities.

Did You Know?

Ontario's 53,000 not for profit organizations employ about one million people. A further 6.3 million Ontarians volunteer their time, contributing millions of hours annually. The not-for-profit sector represents 1.5 per cent of Ontario's workforce and approximately seven per cent of the province's gross domestic product. The sector also provides volunteer opportunities for newcomers to gain Canadian work experience, and skills development for volunteers seeking to re-enter the labour market.

Social Venture Connexion

The Social Venture Connexion – an Ontario-focused private investment platform – helps connect social enterprises that have the potential to effect positive social change with those investors and service providers that can help make it a reality. The Social Venture Connexion is focused on the growing number of not-for-profit and for-profit ventures in Ontario that wish to advance their mission, grow their enterprises and create a positive impact, but lack access to capital.

What We Have Invested

The government has invested \$109,000 to support the development of the Social Venture Connexion alongside several other private sector partners.

What We Have Achieved

The Social Venture Connexion was launched in September 2013 and can be accessed at: www.svx.ca.

As of November 2013, 12 issuers are listed on the Social Venture Connexion: 10 social enterprises and two funds.

Next Steps

The Social Venture Connexion will support Ontario-based social enterprises that are creating opportunities to break the cycle of poverty by helping them to raise new investment. This would include social enterprises operating across numerous areas and segments of society, including affordable housing, employment services, food security and education, and among First Nations and new Canadians.

Why It Matters

Social enterprises provide the following benefits to Ontario:

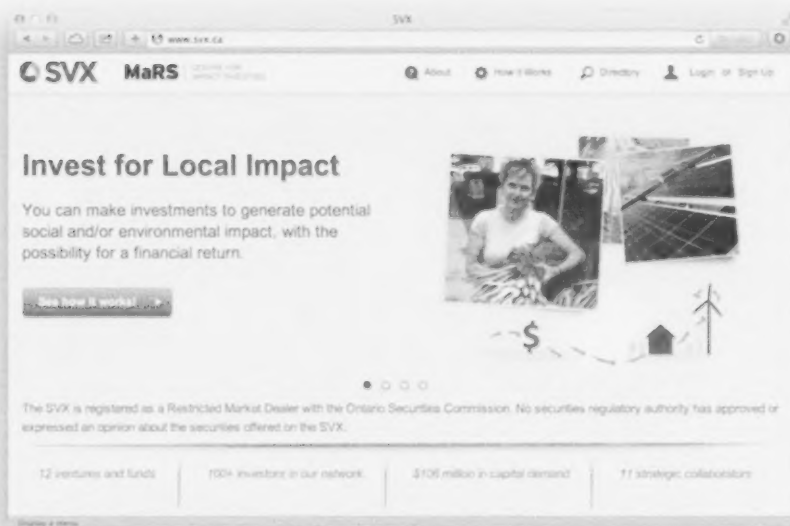
- Jobs for members of traditionally disadvantaged groups (e.g., Aboriginal peoples); and
- Helping to address systemic policy challenges like poverty through new innovative approaches.

Through innovative financing and service-delivery partnerships with government, the not-for-profit and the private sectors, social enterprises may help achieve more cost-effective solutions to pressing social challenges.

Did You Know?

There are an estimated 10,000 social enterprises in Ontario. A recent report of Ontario-based not-for-profit social enterprises indicates that 70 per cent are focused on poverty reduction.

During its pilot stage, the Social Venture Connexion plans to attract at least \$2.5 million in new capital for investment in 10 social ventures.



Ontario Catapult Microloan Fund for Social Enterprises

The Ontario Catapult Microloan Fund for Social Enterprises is a collaborative effort led by the Centre for Social Innovation in partnership with the Government of Ontario, TD Bank Group, Alterna Savings, Microsoft Canada, KPMG, and Social Capital Partners. It has been created to act as a catalyst in the development of early-stage social enterprises. Catapult will enhance loans with training, access to community networks, and a range of other supports unique to the Centre for Social Innovation community. Being a part of the Centre for Social Innovation's community, social entrepreneurs will be able to access the skills, people, and resources that they need for their initiative to succeed.

What We Have Invested

In January 2013, the Ontario government granted \$250,000 to the Centre for Social Innovation to help leverage further investment by private-sector partners for a total fund of \$600,000. This initiative was underway as of June 2013, and the first round of microloans to social enterprises was distributed in the Fall of 2013.

What We Have Achieved

The Ontario Catapult Microloan Fund for Social Enterprise will make between 15 and 25 investments in early stage social enterprises (not-for-profit and for-profit). It will provide loans of \$5,000 to \$25,000 to eligible social ventures/enterprises. Social enterprises will be offered a range of supports to help ensure their success.

The first round of microloans is complete and four loans were issued from ninety applications.

Next Steps

It is anticipated that the fund will be sustainable through loan repayments. A full impact assessment of the investments will be conducted over the next two years.

The second round of microloans is now open to applications and more loans will be issued in early 2014.

Why It Matters

Funding social enterprises will help address systemic policy challenges (like poverty) through new innovative approaches.

Through innovative financing and service-delivery partnerships with government, the not-for-profit and the private sectors, social enterprises may help achieve more cost-effective solutions to pressing social challenges.

Did You Know?

The Microloan Fund can make a significant difference to social enterprises like Furniture Link, which provides job and life skills training and/or employment to at-risk youth, individuals suffering from minor mental disabilities, people with learning disabilities, people receiving Ontario Disability Support Program benefits, and other marginalized people with limited employment opportunities.

Among the first recipients of the Microloan Fund is the Toronto Tool Library, which empowers individuals from low income communities to engage in hands on projects through affordable access to tool sharing.



MEASURES: INDICATORS AND OUTCOMES

Setting an ambitious target of lifting 25 per cent of kids out of poverty over five years and reporting on our progress is an important component of our Poverty Reduction Strategy. Understanding where progress is being made and where we need to focus more attention helps guide our efforts.

About the Indicators

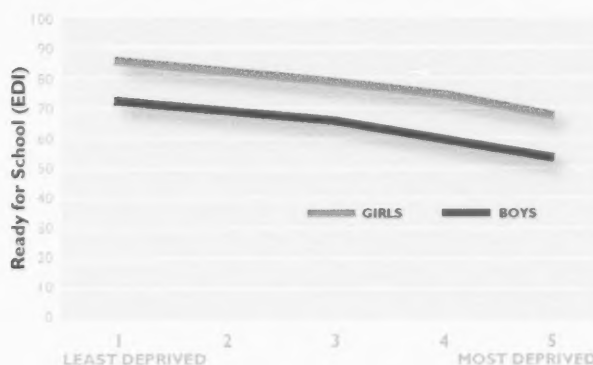
A total of eight indicators were selected during the development of the first Poverty Reduction Strategy which, when taken together, provide a better understanding of the strategy's impact. These eight indicators of opportunity cover key aspects such as income levels, education, health, housing and standard of living.

Our eight indicators are:

1. School Readiness
2. High School Graduation Rates
3. Educational Progress
4. Birth Weights
5. Low Income Measure (LIM)
6. Depth of Poverty
7. Standard of Living
8. Ontario Housing Measure

Statistics Canada data for our income-based indicators lags by 18 months. The impact of our investments on our Low Income Measure, Depth of Poverty, Standard of Living and Ontario Housing Measure indicators are only available up to the third year (2011) of the Poverty Reduction Strategy.

Neighbourhood Material Deprivation (ON-Marg)



Indicator 1: School Readiness

Children have a better chance to succeed as students when they come to school ready to learn. They need to be healthy. They need social and emotional competencies. They need language, thinking and communications skills, and the general knowledge to participate in and benefit from their educational experiences. This indicator is based on the Early Development Instrument (EDI), a population-based measure of children's developmental health and readiness to learn at school.

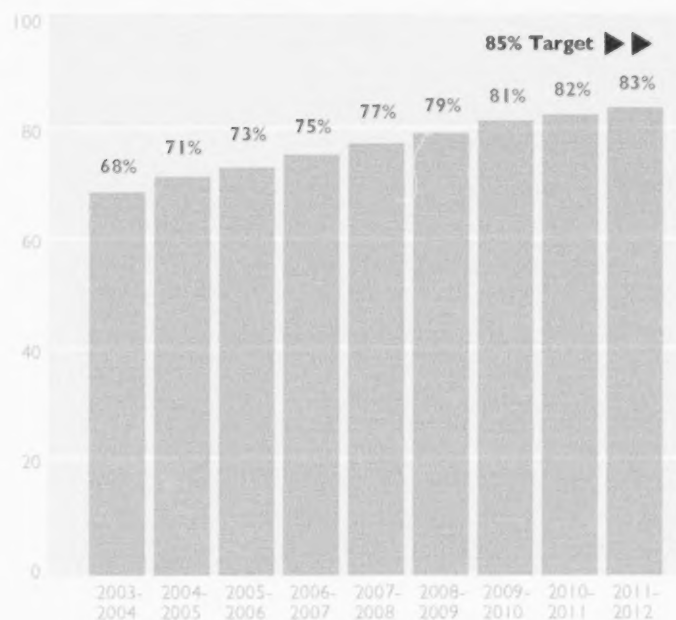
Administered in Senior Kindergarten, it measures children's competencies and skills contributing to their developmental health at school entry in five areas: physical health and wellbeing, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive development, and general knowledge and communication skills. The data is gathered from approximately one third of Ontario school boards each year. As a result, it takes three years to cover the province.

As reported in previous annual progress reports, between 2007 and 2009, 71.5 per cent of children surveyed showed no vulnerabilities. This means that most children in Ontario are doing well, but there are some who are vulnerable to poorer outcomes and who may need additional supports to succeed at school.

Between 2010 and 2012, 72.4 per cent of Ontario children were ready to succeed, including 79.4 per cent of girls and 65.6 per cent of boys. Girls tend to be more ready for school than boys at school entry. When we consider neighbourhood deprivation, children in more materially deprived neighbourhoods tended to be less ready to succeed at school entry.

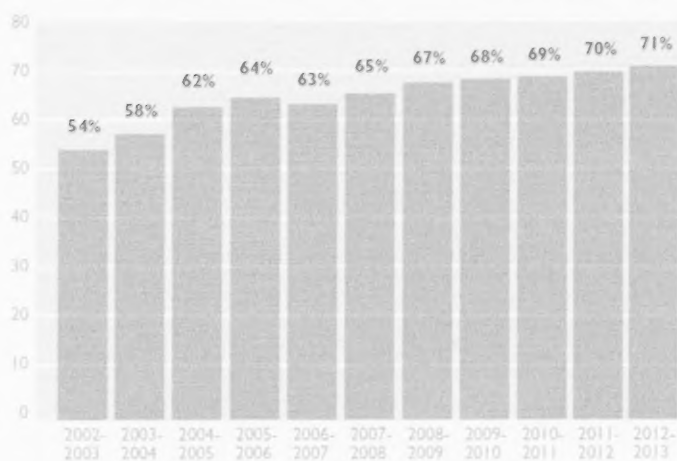
Numerous services and supports across Ontario support healthy child development prior to school entry. Parent and child development programs play an important part in supporting children to get the best possible start in life. Together, programs such as Healthy Babies Healthy Children, Ontario Early Years Centres, Parent and Family Literacy Centres, Infant Hearing Program, Preschool Speech and Language Program and Infant Development Program offer a range of parent support, screening, assessment and treatment services to help children succeed in school and in life.

High School Graduation Rates



Source: Ontario Ministry of Education

EQAO Combined Grade 3 and 6 Reading, Writing and Math (English- and French-Language Schools)



Source: Ontario Ministry of Education based on EQAO data

Indicator 2: High School Graduation Rates

In our knowledge- and skills-based economy, graduating from high school is more important than ever before. Young people with a secondary school diploma have improved chances for a better job and more earning power throughout their lives.

This indicator represents the percentage of high school students who have earned an Ontario Secondary School Diploma in each graduating year. Ontario's graduation rate measures the percentage of a cohort of students who graduate within five years of having started Grade 9.

For the 2011-12 school year, 83 per cent of high school students earned their secondary school diploma – a jump of 15 percentage points from 68 per cent in 2003-04. This means that 115,500 more students have graduated than would have, had the rate remained at the 2003-04 level.

Indicator 3: Educational Progress

Province-wide assessment is one important measure of children's progress in literacy and numeracy, and enables us to pinpoint areas for improvement and to target support to where it is needed most. This measure provides critically important information on planning for student learning and achievement.

This indicator is based on the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) provincial assessment of student achievement as measured against the learning expectations in Ontario's curriculum. It reflects the overall results on the Grades 3 and 6 reading, writing and math assessments.

Over 60,000 additional Grade 3 and Grade 6 students are meeting or exceeding the provincial standard in reading, writing and math, compared with the results of 10 years ago.

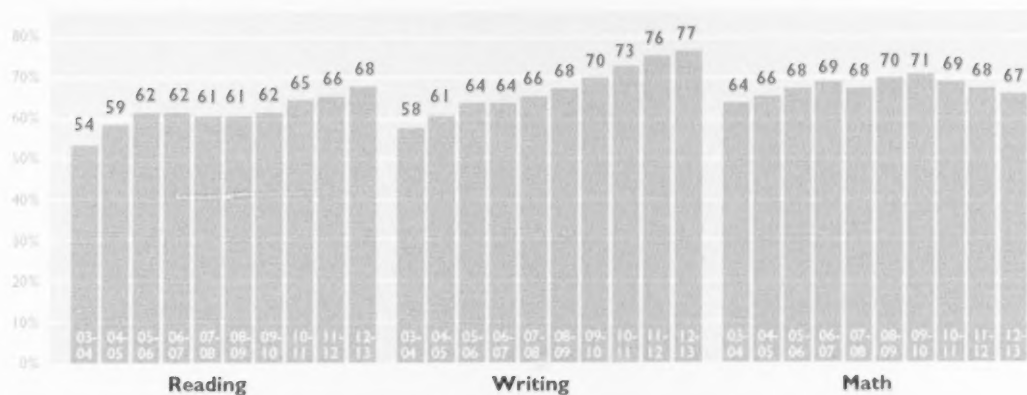
In 2012-13, 71 per cent of Grade 3 and Grade 6 students are mastering the reading, writing and math skills that will lead to success in high school, postsecondary education and the workforce.

This is up from our 2008-09 baseline of 67 per cent and represents a 17 percentage point increase since 2002-03.

Grade 3 Achievement

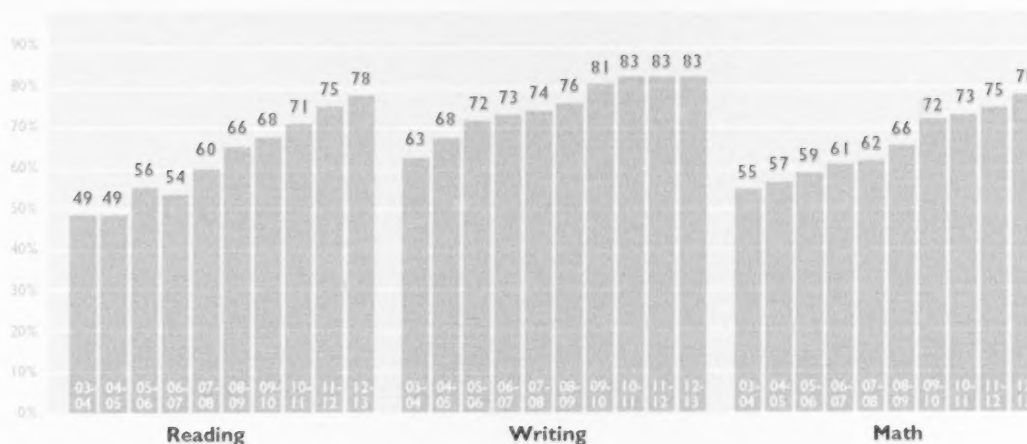
For the 2012-13 assessment of English-language students, 68 per cent of the Grade 3 students in reading, 77 per cent in writing, and 67 per cent in math were at or above the provincial standard on EQAO assessments. Amongst French-language students, 78 per cent of the Grade 3 students in reading, 83 per cent in writing, and 78 per cent in math were at or above the provincial standard on EQAO assessments. It should be noted that the provincial standard is a Level 3 or approximately a "B" grade.

EQAO Grade 3 Reading, Writing and Math English-Language Students



Source: Ontario Ministry of Education based on EQAO data

EQAO Grade 3 Reading, Writing and Math French-Language Students



Source: Ontario Ministry of Education based on EQAO data

Grade 6 Achievement

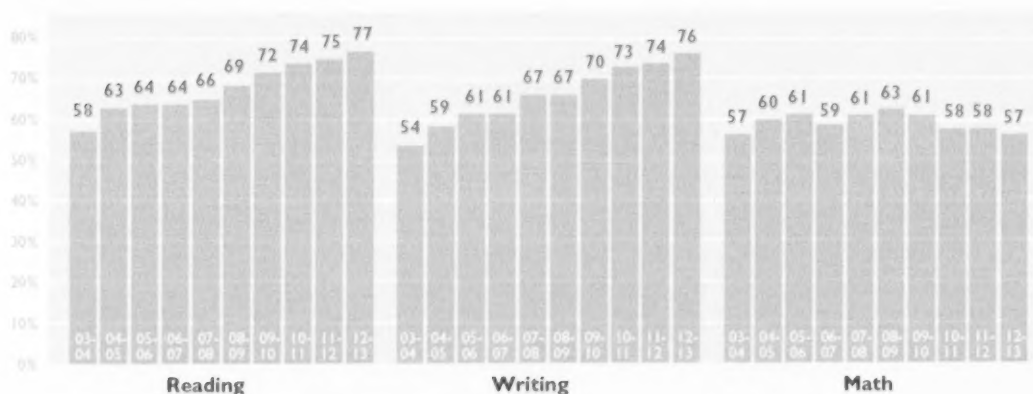
For the 2012-13 assessment of English-language students, 77 per cent of the Grade 6 students in reading, 76 per cent in writing and 57 per cent in math were at or above the provincial standard on EQAO assessments. Amongst French-language students, 89 per cent of the Grade 6 students in reading, 86 per cent in writing, and 81 per cent in math were at or above the provincial standard on EQAO assessments.

Since 2003, the government has reduced class sizes in the primary grades, increased teacher professional learning and raised the graduation rate. Across Ontario, 400 new publicly funded schools have been built and another 170 are planned and/or underway.

In September 2013, about 184,000 of Ontario's four- and five-year-olds at approximately 2,600 schools are benefiting from full-day kindergarten. In September 2014, full-day kindergarten will be available to all of Ontario's four- and five-year-olds in publicly funded elementary schools.

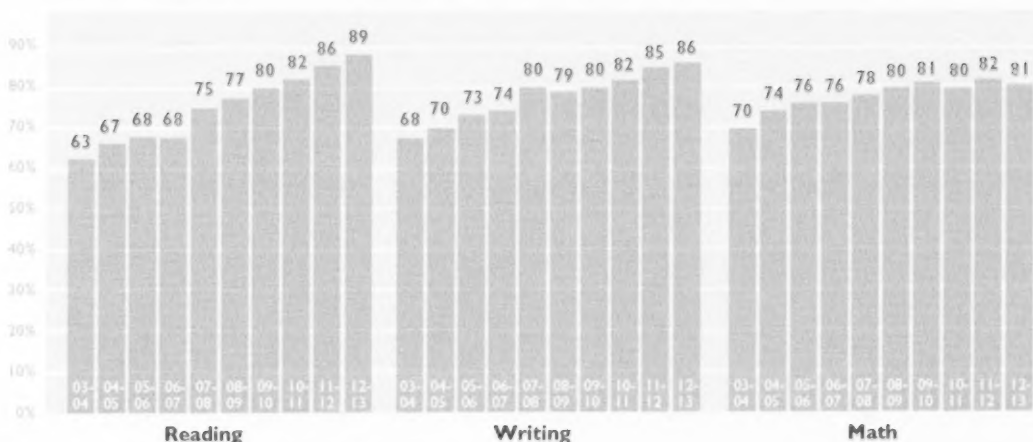
Students who achieve early success in school are more likely to perform well later in school and go on to postsecondary education. This ensures that Ontario will have the skilled workforce to compete in the global economy.

EQAO Grade 6 Reading, Writing and Math English-Language Students



Source: Ontario Ministry of Education based on EQAO data

EQAO Grade 6 Reading, Writing and Math French-Language Students



Source: Ontario Ministry of Education based on EQAO data

Indicator 4: Birth Weights

Healthy children have more opportunity to succeed in virtually every aspect of life from early childhood to adulthood.

This indicator represents the percentage of newborns born at a healthy weight for their gestational age. Research indicates that babies born to low-income families more often have below-normal birth weights, which can put them at a higher risk for poor future health outcomes. As we reported in our Fourth Progress Report (2012), in 2010–12, 80.7 per cent of Ontario-born babies were born at a healthy weight. This indicator is updated every three years. Our next update will be in 2015.

Indicator 5: Low Income Measure

Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy uses Statistics Canada's Low Income Measure (LIM50) fixed to a base year of 2008 to define poverty and is used to assess progress in reducing child poverty. The fixed LIM50 is used to measure the percentage of children under 18 living in a household with an income less than 50 per cent of the median adjusted household income.

The goal of the Poverty Reduction Strategy is to reduce the number of children living in poverty by 25 per cent over five years, which means lifting 103,000 children above the poverty line.

In 2011, 13.6 per cent of all Ontario children were below the fixed LIM50, down from 15.2 per cent in 2008. In the first three years of the Strategy, about 47,000 children and their families were lifted out of poverty. The number of children in poverty was 365,000 in 2011.

The overall children's low-income rate includes children in many different circumstances. For example, the low-income rate of children in:

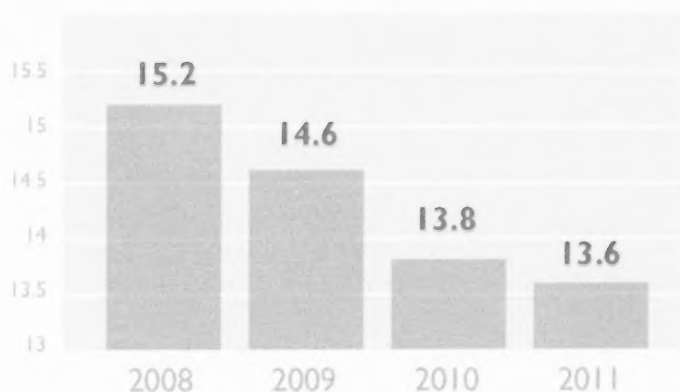
- Female lone-parent families was 37.4 per cent in 2011, up from 35.6 per cent in 2010, but lower than 43.7 per cent in 2008.
- Two-parent families was 9.7 per cent in 2011, down from 10.7 per cent in 2010 and 10.3 per cent in 2008.
- All other families (male lone-parent families and families headed by a grandparent or other relative) were 21.1 per cent in 2011, up from 13.8 per cent in 2010 and 15.4 per cent in 2008.

Most children are in two-parent families (82 per cent in 2011) and female lone-parent families (12 per cent). About six per cent of children are in other families.

The Poverty Reduction Strategy has helped keep child poverty from climbing in the aftermath of the global economic recession.

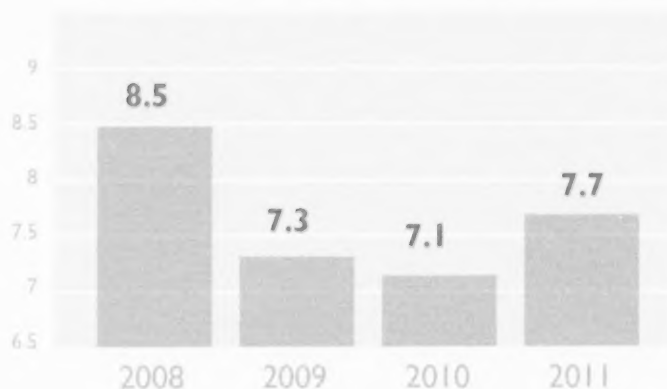
Without the Poverty Reduction Strategy, about 426,000 children would have been in poverty in 2011, 61,000 higher than the actual estimate of 365,000.

Per cent of Ontario Children Below the Fixed LIM50



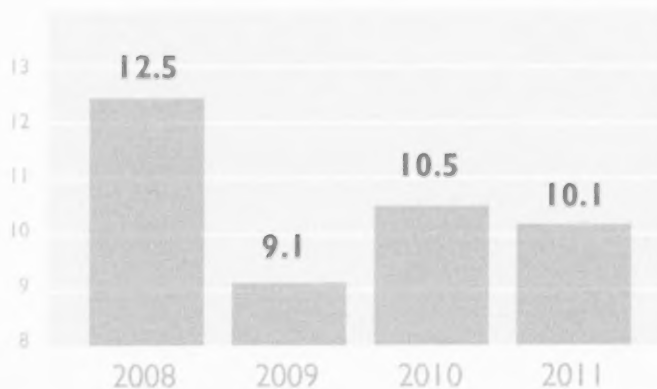
Source: Ontario Ministry of Finance based on Statistics Canada's Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics

Per cent of Ontario Children Below the Fixed LIM40



Source: Ontario Ministry of Finance based on Statistics Canada's Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics.

Per cent of Children in Households Lacking Two or More Items



Source: Ontario Ministry of Finance based on Statistics Canada's Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics.

Indicator 6: Depth of Poverty

The depth of poverty indicator informs us on the wellbeing of those living in deep poverty. This indicator is based on the Low Income Measure (LIM40) fixed to a base year of 2008. This represents the percentage of children under 18 living in a household with an income less than 40 per cent of the median adjusted household income in 2008.

In 2011, 7.7 per cent of Ontario children were in deep poverty, up from 7.1 per cent in 2010. The increase partly reflects the phasing-out of the Temporary Ontario Sales Tax Transition Benefit, from \$665 per family in 2010 to \$335 in 2011. The depth of poverty measure is still down from 8.5 per cent in 2008.

The number of children in deep poverty is lower by 25,000 three years into the strategy.

Indicator 7: Standard of Living

This indicator measures how many people cannot afford a standard of living that most Ontarians take for granted based on a list of 10 questions on select necessities. Households are deprived or poor according to this indicator if they do not have and cannot afford two or more of the items in the list. This indicator was developed for the Poverty Reduction Strategy by the Caledon Institute and the Daily Bread Food Bank, in partnership with Statistics Canada and the Ontario government.

In 2011, 10.1 per cent of children were in households lacking two or more items, down from 10.5 per cent in 2010¹ and 12.5 per cent in 2008. The all-persons' deprivation rate was 9.4 per cent in 2011, down from 9.8 per cent in 2010 and 11.1 per cent in 2008.

¹ Statistics Canada has revised the material deprivation data for the years 2009 and 2010. Note also that there was a change in surveys from 2008 to 2009.

Indicator 8: Ontario Housing Measure

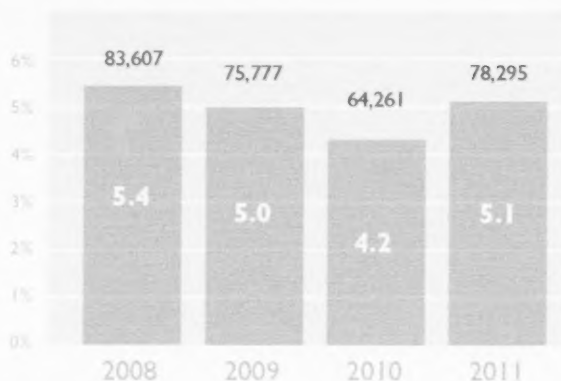
Children have better chances to thrive and grow – emotionally, mentally and academically – when they live in safe, stable housing. This measure tells us how many low-income households with children have housing costs that are disproportionately high relative to household income, which can affect children's ability to thrive and grow even in a supportive environment.

The Ontario Housing Measure lays out the percentage of households with children under 18 that have incomes below 40 per cent of the median household income (LIM40) and spend more than 40 per cent of their income on housing.

The percentage of Ontario households captured under the Ontario Housing Measure increased from 4.2 per cent in 2010 to 5.1 per cent in 2011. Between 2008 and 2011, the Ontario Housing Measure declined from 83,607 households to 78,295 households respectively.

Ontario Housing Measure

Percentage and Number of Households



Source: Statistics Canada



A LOOK BACK – AN ASSESSMENT OF ONTARIO'S FIRST POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY

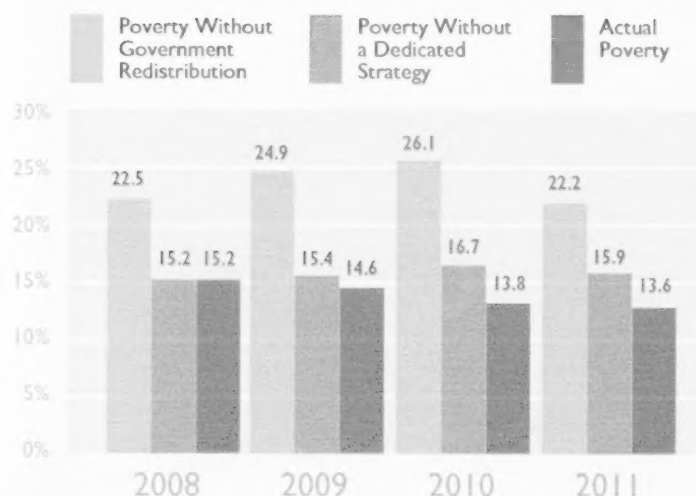
Impact of the First Poverty Reduction Strategy

Ontario's first Poverty Reduction Strategy, launched in 2008, was considered groundbreaking. The strategy arrived at a crucial time when Ontario's economy was just beginning to experience the effects of the global recession and many Ontarians who had lost their jobs faced the prospect of an uncertain future.

Targeted investments such as the Ontario Child Benefit, social assistance, tax cuts, and initiatives such as full-day kindergarten, Healthy Smiles Ontario, and Second Career helped many Ontarians through the worst of the recession.

Although poverty rates typically climb significantly during recessions, Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy largely offset the effects of the recession for low-income families with children.

The Poverty Reduction Strategy Helps Lower Child Poverty



Source: Ontario Ministry of Finance (using Statistics Canada data), 2013

Unlike previous recessions, the actual child poverty rate in Ontario fell during the most recent recession, from 15.2 per cent in 2008 to 13.6 per cent in 2011. This is a new occurrence. During the two previous recessions in the early 1980s and early 1990s, the child poverty rate increased. Market forces, if left alone, would have pushed up the poverty rate in 2009 and 2010.

We set a target of reducing child poverty by 25 per cent over the five years of the strategy. We believe that establishing a specific and ambitious target served an important purpose. It set a high bar to rally around and created greater focus on reducing child poverty both within and outside government. At the outset, we based our ability to reach this goal on three specific conditions:

- Ontario investing in key poverty initiatives, such as the Ontario Child Benefit;
- The federal government increasing the National Child Benefit Supplement by \$1,200 per child and doubling the amount of the Working Income Tax Benefit to \$2,000 a year per family; and
- The provincial economy growing by an average of at least 2.5 per cent annually.

Our government recognizes that neither the increases in federal funding nor the anticipated economic growth to the province's economy materialized.

Without the Poverty Reduction Strategy, an estimated 15.9 per cent of Ontario children would have been living in low-income families in 2011. Instead, the strategy prevented 61,000 children from being in poverty in 2011.

Key Poverty Commitments Under the First Strategy

When it was launched in December 2008, *Breaking the Cycle* included key commitments in a number of areas:

- Education;
- Income supports;
- Health and wellbeing;
- Housing;
- Employment training;
- Labour protections;
- Social investment/innovation; and
- Vulnerable populations, including people with disabilities.

Our government also made commitments specifically related to the governance and oversight of the strategy (through a Results Table) and upheld its legislative requirements around public reporting by releasing annual progress reports.

Under the strategy, our government has met or is continuing to make progress on the vast majority of the commitments. And some Poverty Reduction Strategy commitments have been achieved. For example, full-day kindergarten – a key commitment – is on track to be fully implemented across the province.

Social Assistance Reforms

The commitment to review social assistance programs generated the most interest from poverty stakeholders. Due to the complexity of the social assistance system, the government sought the advice of an advisory council before tackling a formal review. This advice helped us to set up and launch the Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario. Given that it was the largest review of social assistance programs in over 20 years, it was important to be diligent and take the time necessary to fully examine all aspects of the system. The Commission submitted its final report in October 2012. Our government supports the objectives described in the Commission's report and we are committed to the end goal of reducing poverty by increasing opportunities for Ontarians. Our 2013 Budget took initial steps to reform the social assistance system with a focus on improving incomes, promoting employment outcomes and increasing fairness.

Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy

The Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy was released in 2010. It included regulatory changes that reduced "red tape," simplified rules, and provided municipalities with more flexibility to address local needs. Stakeholders have argued that this strategy would have benefited from a long-term investment in housing and homelessness from both senior levels of government. Our government continues to implement commitments made in the strategy and recognizes the need for affordable housing and its role in supporting the health and growth of communities across Ontario. Since 2003, the government has committed nearly \$3 billion in the largest affordable housing investment in Ontario's history.

Ontario Child Benefit Increases

The Ontario Child Benefit is a direct income support that has helped lower the child poverty rate over the past three years. In 2009, the government increased the maximum annual benefit from \$600 per child/year to \$1,100 per child/year and committed to raising the benefit to \$1,310. In 2012, our government increased the Ontario Child Benefit to \$1,210 and confirmed our commitment to increase the benefit to \$1,310 by July 2014. The Ontario Child Benefit, over the life of the first Poverty Reduction Strategy and the accelerated increase in 2009, had a significant impact on putting income in the hands of low-income families to assist with raising their children.

Opportunities for Ontario's Next Poverty Reduction Strategy

Ontario's first Poverty Reduction Strategy provided both direct and indirect supports to help lift children out of poverty. Prioritizing children and youth, however, meant that other low-income Ontarians did not have the same targeted attention under the strategy.

Our government recognizes that low-income adults in Ontario would benefit from having access to some of the initiatives that benefited children. For example, they could also have benefited from a program providing greater access to dental care to help address preventative as well as urgent needs for dental treatment. Good oral health care can impact one's overall health and remove social and employment barriers.

Our government also acknowledges that there is a greater need to provide more culturally appropriate supports for Aboriginal communities. Aboriginal communities in Ontario continue to experience higher poverty rates than the general population. In 2010, according to the National Household Survey, 23.5 per cent of Ontario's Aboriginal people lived in low-income households, which is much higher than the segment of non-Aboriginal people at 13.7 per cent. We recognize that further interventions are essential in Aboriginal communities and that the supports need to be holistic, integrated, and community-driven (i.e., focused on the entire family/community). Further steps are needed to broaden the impact of poverty reduction efforts in the province's Aboriginal communities.

From the beginning, we acknowledged that "one size does not fit all" when it comes to poverty reduction. Some vulnerable groups of Ontarians continue to experience higher rates of poverty than the province's general population. While the strategy included targeted supports for vulnerable populations, data shows that continued disparity remains for specific groups, including single parents, recent immigrants, seniors, and persons with disabilities.

Our government acknowledges that more work has to be done to fully understand the circumstances that continue to lead different vulnerable populations into poverty and the tools needed to help lift them out. Feedback from recent public consultations conducted by the province to inform the development of a new Poverty Reduction Strategy indicated that there is a greater need to apply evidence-based and best practice lenses when dealing with poverty reduction efforts and vulnerable population groups.

One significant commentary from an online survey conducted during the consultation process put it this way: "For those strategies targeting specific population groups, the Middlesex-London Health Unit would urge the Ontario government to utilize evidence to inform decision-making regarding funding and poverty reduction programs/measures. Focusing on particular groups, if not grounded in evidence, may result in some vulnerable population groups being inadvertently overlooked."

The strategy relied on a suite of indicators to measure the impacts of indirect supports on lifting kids out of poverty. While all the indicators show improvement, our government believes there is a need to fine-tune indicators moving forward in order to help us more effectively use data results to understand the root causes of poverty among certain groups and the types of interventions that would be most effective.

Stronger Coordination

A Poverty Reduction Strategy Results Table was created to oversee the monitoring and implementation of Ontario's first Poverty Reduction Strategy, including the preparation of Annual Progress Reports. It also acted as a clearinghouse to review and provide advice on policies and programs within government with significant poverty-related implications.

Looking back, our government sees that this oversight group could have benefited from a broader mandate to provide policy and program advice to impact the implementation and delivery of the first strategy.

With the passage of the *Poverty Reduction Act, 2009*, our government made a long-term commitment to poverty reduction. Successive governments are now required under the legislation to develop future poverty reduction strategies. For the future wellbeing of all Ontarians, it is essential that our fight against poverty transcend four-year government mandates and span decades, if not generations. Poverty reduction must be a long-term endeavour, supported by strong multi-faceted policy solutions and ongoing stakeholder and community engagement. Ontarians deserve nothing less.

THE WAY FORWARD

Despite a backdrop of serious economic pressures, much was achieved under the first Poverty Reduction Strategy. The first strategy made a difference in the lives of many people in Ontario who were living in poverty. It will have a lasting legacy as we continue to support and build upon many of the key initiatives of the first strategy.

Still, we know that there is much more that needs to be done. Poverty reduction is a complex and broad undertaking and requires a multi-pronged approach over the long term. We must seek to better understand the impact of our investments and consider where opportunities remain and how to best target our resources to make further progress in our fight against poverty.

A Collective Fight Against Poverty – The Role of Federal and Municipal Governments

Despite all our efforts, our government is well aware that we cannot achieve the goals of poverty reduction alone. Fighting poverty exceeds the capacity of any one government. Collective action from all levels of government is imperative to make lasting gains in reducing poverty.

The federal government and municipalities across the province have a collective role to play in Ontario's continued fight against poverty. Over the course of the first Poverty Reduction Strategy, the federal government partnered with the province in investing in new housing infrastructure and in affordable and social housing initiatives. Some gains were made for working families through federal tax benefits. But more support from the federal government is required to break the cycle of poverty. Poverty reduction could be accelerated through federal funding support in critical areas such as child care, early learning, skills training and increased support to unemployed workers. Our government looks forward to continued and strategic partnerships between Ontario and the federal government to improve the lives of low-income people in the province. Through collaboration with Ottawa, we can continue our efforts to build a fair society.

Municipal governments are the closest to their communities and are best placed to put poverty reduction initiatives into action. Some municipalities have shown outstanding leadership in creating local poverty reduction roundtables to mobilize community action. We applaud these initiatives and recognize their importance in galvanizing the collective action of communities, not-for-profit and private sector organizations to engage and invest in activities that help to alleviate poverty.

Our government acknowledges the contribution of many across Ontario, who, over the life of the first strategy, demonstrated their commitment to help people in communities throughout the province break the cycle of poverty.

As we move forward, we will continue to require an "all hands on deck" approach to make further strides in the fight against poverty. Breaking the cycle of poverty transcends the mandate of any one government and we must all dedicate ourselves to finding solutions to make a lasting difference in the lives of people most in need.

Ontario's New Five-Year Poverty Reduction Strategy – What We Heard

Over the late summer and early fall, we engaged in a broad consultation process to gain input into developing a renewed Poverty Reduction Strategy. For more than two months, consultations were held in communities across the province. It was an important opportunity for the people of Ontario to add their voices and offer their perspectives on how to best tackle the ongoing issues of poverty. We heard about what's working to support Ontario families and protect the most vulnerable and we heard about what more can be done to build a fair province, where everyone can better share in its prosperity. We heard from people who have experienced poverty. We heard from community groups and social services organizations that support those in need.

Our government heard from individuals from all walks of life and the message was clear; we need to help all Ontarians living in poverty. Our first strategy put a special focus on children from low-income backgrounds and their families, as a means to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty. Through the consultation process, people wanted to ensure that, going forward, our poverty reduction efforts target a broader base of people in need. Many also felt that the most effective way to address poverty was by putting greater focus on job skills and training programs. Improving people's prospects for attaining gainful employment was seen as the key to independence and economic self-sufficiency.

We thank the thousands of people who contributed their perspectives in shaping the next Poverty Reduction Strategy, which will be released in the spring of 2014. We recognize that the first strategy was just a starting point, and that there are opportunities that still need to be addressed in the fight against poverty.

We are working on developing a new strategy that will go further in addressing barriers to employment through a combination of direct and indirect supports. Supporting people to improve their employment prospects is even more essential during a time of continued economic challenges. We recognize that during times of global economic pressures, it is even more important to invest in the people who are most impacted. We also recognize that strengthening the province's social safety net remains essential so that it will be there for those who need it when they need it.

Our government is committed to breaking the cycle of poverty by creating the opportunity for all low-income people in Ontario to improve their lives. We want to put the tools into people's hands so we will all be able to share in the prosperity of this great province together.

ontario.ca/breakingthecycle

